Balkan Art Scene: Collection of Interviews 2020 - 2025

Hana Tiro

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Author Note

Journalism has been part of my professional orientation since college years. It brought me satisfaction to give space to voices in science, arts, media and sometimes politics. After several years, in 2020 I founded a volunteer project called Balkan Art Scene, a platform and community to promote Balkan artists by writing about them in English language. Today Balkan Art Scene has more than 300 published articles, from interviews to press releases, to free form articles where I shared artists' and organizations' work and activism. I developed the network and content primarily through Instagram profile www.instagram.com/balkanartscene, Facebook page *Balkan Art Scene*, and Facebook group *Balkan Art Scene (BAS) Community*, and the website www.balkanartscene.com. Domain and hosting was fully licensed and bought through Wix.com, for each year of the website's activity. Copyright note was in the footer of the website - If any image being used violates your copyright, please contact us at the address below. All the communication was developed through balkanartscene@gmail.com. In the first three months I contacted over 200 artists, got 100 answers, and made 20 interviews. The amount of different energies created a space where other artists across the Balkan countries shared their comments and contacted me for collaboration.

When it comes to activism, I decided to be present. The Palestinian Ashtar Theater organized the viral project Gaza Monologues, using texts from 2010 which were monologues written by young people from Gaza who shared their personal stories about war and siege. I chose to read, record, and publish on Instagram a text written by Fateema Atallah, born in 1996 in Ash Sheikh Radwan.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools for editing and generating text arose in 2023 and became widely used. The em dash (—) in text turned into a signal for AI usage because these tools generated it massively. But it is important to know that Balkan Art Scene, since its beginning in 2020 had all titles written with an em dash. Aside from this AI hectic anecdote, artificial

intelligence tools did not significantly change the working system of Balkan Art Scene. Through the years, the community grew to over 5000 members on website, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

In this publication you can find all the interviews I conducted since the platform's founding.

Hana Tiro

Februar, 2026

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I would like to thank my wonderful parents Marina and Halid and talented sister Sara for continuously being there for me, and for an advice that a business plan has a precise measurements and equally a variable.

Sonja Lakić — Architect and Curator, Honoring the Human Clay**; November 25, 2020**

Sonja Lakić is an internationally trained architect and researcher with a PhD in Urban Studies. Her work revolves around open architecture and dialectical urbanism, with a keen interest in the lived forms of buildings, encompassing anthropological and sociological aspects of architectural design and the built environment. Her interests range from writing and photography to filmmaking.

Sonja nurtures her fondness towards different disciplines and scales; she also collects oral histories by practicing unconventional ethnography.

In her work, Sonja traces the actual conduct of life in/of architecture and cities. Sonja's latest work is in a curatorship role for Lisbon Architecture Triennale, within the framework of the Future Architecture platform. The exhibition that she entitled *Handle with Care: Tales of the Invisible* is currently shown in Triennale headquarters, at Palácio Sinel de Cordes, Lisbon, Portugal. From the curatorial statement:

Tales of the Invisible is not just another exhibition about architecture, but a journey deep within whatever architecture may be or may not be, and whatever form it may take or not take. It is a portrayal of the non-evident and homage to the quirks of the human mind. "We can survive without people's architects; it is more important that people themselves can be architects." Harry Šein; "Of Emptiness, What Else"; article published in the newspaper "Sirp ja Vasar" following the 1978 Tallinn School exhibition.

Sonja adds:

> This is the tribute to human clay: the one that connects and yet separates. Here, we celebrate imagination and passion, individual effort(s) and collective endeavors, dreams and hopes, as well as the courage to act in the name of love for all humankind. This is an ode to ideas and designs that never came to be; a call to re-think where we stand; an appeal to step back, hence unlearn whatever we believe we already know. This is a gentle reminder that life comes before buildings and an appeal to keep one's mind and heart wide open, for this is how one shall do good. (From our written interview conducted in 2020)

Handle with care: Tales of the Invisible is developed in three chapters, taking the visitors on a retrospective walk across the landscapes of care of the former architectural Europe and/or European architecture, getting them to know better the mindscapes of wizards who, back in the 1960s and the 1970s, decided to stand tall and advocate for a human-oriented approach. It is bringing together a diversity of content ranging from studies, axonometric photographs, illustrations and sketches, reproduced collages and models, as well as interviews and personal testimonials.

Sonja Lakić has an activist-oriented curatorial approach, and it resulted in “Tales of Non-Architectures: The urban wonder of Parco Centrale by Franco Purini and Laura Thermes” (from the collection of MAXXI – the National Museum of 21st Century Arts, Rome, Italy), “Tales of the Permissible: The Architects of the Tallinn School” (from the collection of Estonian Museum of Architecture, Tallinn, Estonia) and “The Paperers’ Tale: Smer B, Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering” (from Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana, Slovenia) that are shown in Lisbon until December 12, 2020.

Helena Mamich — The Soprano of Opera CILS, Human Existence and Freedom;

December 10, 2020

The opera *CILS* thematizes human freedom, depicted metaphorically through birds, one in a cage and the other one free. The opera for birds, as written in the announcement, was composed recently in the words of the French poet, architect, and painter, Jerome Karsenti. Opera *CILS* is an opera for birds by Ken Shakin, with mezzo-soprano Olga Gumeniuc, dancer and pianist Esmaeel Hajhashemi, and with soprano Helena Mamich.

Helena Mamich, a doctor and a musician, was born in Canberra and grew up in Split, Croatia, where she graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Split. She completed her undergraduate music studies in Canberra and her master’s degree from the Australian National University of Sydney, in the tenor class of Dr. Paul McMahon. She has

dedicated herself to contemporary music while still a student and is the winner of the first prize of the Australian competition for contemporary music, New Music Art Song, in 2015.

She has performed in Croatia, Italy, Canada, Germany, Estonia, and France. She is a member of the chamber trio Arbor Vitae. Opera *CILS* had its premiere on October 31st, 2020, in Theatre Bethanien, and was broadcasted on Radio On Berlin.

Helena's role is the Bird, an announcer of freedom, a reflection of the Dreamer's desires. Helena comments that the music itself was not easy for the performers. The text is in French, there are a lot of atonal things, the avant-garde, and it leans a bit on Messiaen by the type of composition. Helena sings without the lyrics because she plays a Bird, therefore she cannot speak. So, she sings vocals. These vocalizations collide with Dreamer's singing, and the piano accompaniment makes it work very good together.

Costumes are all in black, and the space where the opera is performed is dark with low lighting. Only the Bird has colorful wings because it represents freedom. The opera is short but very sharp. It focuses on human existence and re-examines how important our freedom is to us, humans. It is important to note that the bird in a cage, Ismail, does not come out of the cage so easily despite the fact that the key exists. It is a total blockage of the mind; this is a very important symbol in the opera.

Modern Outlook

During this period of a coronavirus, people experienced severe claustrophobia. Many have mentally failed because this kind of oppression has happened; they have lost their jobs; they have lost their freedom. This opera is a total realism. It is not something unreal. It is the present human, heavy and bitter, and translated into art, taking the viewers into the magical world of music.

Daniel More — The Multidimensional Artist**; December 10, 2020**

Daniel More is a musician, double bassist, and improviser. He is an alumnus of the Bern University of the Arts and the Jerusalem Academy of Music. Currently active in different musical and artistic projects, among them the Noise and Silence Orchestra (NSO), “Just Listen” workshop, and making music for the film *A Year the Land 4 Men.*

Improvisation Made for Film

Daniel's experience in improvisation made him part of the project *A Year the Land 4 Men*. Film is directed and music composed by Boris Kovač, production by KacharaMMstudio, while More had an opportunity to add his touch of improvisation. Four characters, through four seasons, paint a fresco of the transience of their everyday life. The film creates a space where the poetics of directors and composers meet the life of the protagonist. Music opens the inner plan of the film which combines documentary material and poetic images.

Community Musician

Daniel leads a musical workshop called *Just Listen*. The goal of the workshop is to create a space where people (whether they are novice, amateur, or even professional musicians) can experience and explore music as a form of communication and self-expression while enhancing their listening, improvisation, and concentration skills. Through different exercises and methods from a variety of traditions and schools, the workshop is trying to make the music a canvas of nonverbal communication, “in the moment” composition, and build a sense of community.

Just Listen workshop led to the development of an amateur improvisation ensemble called Noise and Silence Orchestra (NSO), based in Novi Sad. Noise and Silence Orchestra (NSO) serves as an musical improvisation playground where people come to enjoy music and can try different ideas and concepts. It is a mixed and a dynamic group of people, consisting of professional musicians, amateur musicians, and complete novice musicians. It is an improvised community music. In order to achieve the sense of unity, warm-up exercises relate to yoga,

meditation, and breathing practices, and one of the basic techniques, which is "looping" is very much related to the idea of "mantra".

Meditation and Music

Musical project which awaits its premier is an album with Jasna Jovicevic that presents her process of dealing with corona crisis with improvisation through meditation. The name of the album is *Sounding Solitude*, and it will be released on the label Mascom Records. Musicians working on the album are Jasna Jovicevic (saxophones, bass clarinet, space drum, voice), Filip Krumes (violin), Ivana Grahovac (cello), Milan Nikolic (double bass), Daniel More (double bass and guimbri - small moroccan bass). Jasna states that the isolation and the sudden changes on a global level made her explore the state of unknown, solitude without music making, interaction with one's own fears instead of social comfort, as stated by the author. This album reflects one of the most challenging periods we all went through alone and lonely.

Sounding Solitude marks the inner journey into the new reality. Artistic research consisted of several segments: investigation of psychological studies that deal with methodologies for overcoming loss and grief, in our case sudden global lockdown and pandemics; study of yogic and Buddhist meditation techniques that help in overcoming a state of anxiety, depression, fear, and isolation, serving as the antidotes; and a sonified projection of the personal reaction to these new outcomes.

Rock'n'roll, much?

As if Daniel doesn't have enough plans in his hands, we are awaiting his second album in the rock'n'roll genre. Rock album *Gerecki*, named after the band, will be released in December, 2020. Members and creators of the album are Dimitrije Jakovljevic (guitar,voice, production), Nenad Patkovic (guitars), Ozren Lazic (drums), and Daniel More (electric bass). The album is made out of pure love and musical-spiritual compatibility. As a versatile freelance musician, Daniel More's experience really does range widely, from classical music to world music to jazz and free improvisation.

Fuad Šetić — Up-and-Coming Conductor and Accompanist**; December 20, 2020**

Fuad Šetić is a conductor and accompanist from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Šetić completed his undergraduate and graduate studies at the Sarajevo Music Academy, where he won two Golden Badges, and completed his Master's degree in Music Management in 2020 at the University of Westminster, London, as part of a Chevening Scholarship.

As a choir singer, orchestral player, accordion soloist, accompanist and conductor, he has performed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Turkey, Belgium and Austria. He made significant performances at festivals Sonemus FEST, Sarajevo Winter, May Music Festival, Camp of Slovenian Choirs in Šentvid, International Festival of the Ivan Cankar Association in Vrhnika, Zenica Spring, etc.

As a conductor, he led the choirs of the Mixed Choir Camerata Slovenica, Mixed Choir Davorin Jenko, Female Choir Slovenčice, Kovači Sound Smiths International Children's Choir, Chamber Mixed Choir Lola, Youth Choir Cantabile, and collaborated with orchestras such as the Belg'harmonika Accordion Orchestra, the Orchestra of Sarajevo Music Academy, the Mostar Sinfonietta Orchestra, Zenica Chamber Symphony Orchestra, and the Sarajevo Philharmonic. In July 2020, he was appointed a member of the jury at the International Orchestra Auditions Awards.

Fuad Šetić's interests are also focused on public interdisciplinary art projects that focus on the new role of art in contemporary society, as well as in creating space for young professional musicians. He is a member of the INSAM Institute for Contemporary Art Music.

Since April 2018, he has been the Art Director of the Festival of Classical Music Orfej, and Vice President of Organizing Committee of the Festival, which cooperates with colleagues from East Sarajevo and Banja Luka in cooperation with the Association of Citizens for Maintaining Classical Music Koral. The idea behind the Festival is to promote classical music, with the aim of spreading it to all strata of society.

Commenting on current youth activities, Šetić shares his thoughts on his blog that a hypothetical youth orchestra would be a multi-sided platform, which is defined as an organization that creates value by enabling direct contact and interactions between two or more customer groups (Hagiu and Wright, 2015). This model would primarily be a version of a 'talent incubator' for young professionals at the beginning of their careers, but also an employment hub, dealing with the employment of musicians exclusively. Secondarily, it would work as a classical music provider service. Therefore, on one hand, as 'customers' or 'consumers' we have the audience, and on the other hand, we have other professional orchestras.

Šetić moved from theory to implementation and made a first step by founding a youth orchestra in Sarajevo, with the help of a few young enthusiasts. The orchestra already had its debut performance in 2019, but due to pandemic they had to pause their work. Future collaborations have already been booked, work is underway to solve the funding, and now they are just waiting for some happier and safer times to be able to create art together.

Fuad Šetić currently lives and creates in Sarajevo, where he works as an art associate at the Department of Conducting at the Music Academy at the University of Sarajevo.

Hanna Dujmović — Creating Warm and Bright Ambience with Dynamic Patterns**; January 2, 2021**

Hanna Dujmović is a sculptor based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She graduated High School of Applied Arts, and in 2017 got a degree from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, Department of Sculpture, with the Silver Badge of the Generation.

Due to the lack of adequate space for a sculpture studio, she decided to present her art in the form of unique paintings on canvas. Since she nurtures a love for all artistic disciplines, it was not a problem for her to adapt to the space in which she works and creates. The paintings are recognizable by the bright and strong colors used by the artist, as well as many details that enrich the composition.

In 2020, she began her first painting cycles. Her work is currently presented on four world platforms dealing with the promotion and sale of works of art, as well as in many private collections of collectors from various parts of the world. The artist finds inspiration for her works in an inexhaustible source of her imagination. In most of the paintings, female character represents a self-portrait of the artist in a period of isolation. Characters are presented inside the closed space, a warm and playful ambience, decorated with wavy and dynamic patterns that give the composition an interesting story. The observer is drawn into a completely different dimension of life, which is an indication that even in the difficult times we live through art and can experience a journey to beautiful places. Her work has been presented at nine collective exhibitions, three of which were particularly significant — London, San Francisco, Naples.

In 2017, she held the first solo exhibition of sculptural works in the gallery space of Raiffeisen Bank in Sarajevo; the works presented at the exhibition were nominated for the Alija Kučukalić Award. In 2019, in Sarajevo, he and his colleague Merima Pirija founded an edu-creative art studio called EdusKreativus. Through the creative program of the studio, he works on the education of school children and children with disabilities, organizes art-therapy workshops for adults, and participates in the implementation of numerous projects related to the promotion of art in BiH. One of those projects was Outdoor Atelier - which took place as part of the Equestrian Cultural Summer 2019.

She lives and works in Sarajevo.

Daydreaming

Daydreaming (40x40cm) acrylic on canvas. The painting was created during quarantine in April 2020. Inspiration was found in solving the painting composition of the interior space in the works of one of the best painters of all time, Henri Matisse.

> A female character dreaming at the table in the foreground is my self-portrait. In the second and third plan of the painting, there is a room that is placed in the perspective of depth, and an open window that gives meaning to the whole composition, a sea view that expresses my desire to calm down, like the feeling when I'm at the coast, when I sink into the calm sound and smell of the sea. The colors I used make one contrast, the

opposite, the reality we lived in, the grayness, the negativity. I wanted to draw attention with one bold choice of vibrant colors. This painting is now part of the collection of a collector from Great Britain. (Explained by the artist)

Monja

Monja (80x80). Another composition in a series in which a female character is presented indoors.

In my opinion, the realization is especially keen because it belongs to the phase of the cycle within which I used the royal blue shade, which I consider to have given the works a special depth and aesthetic value. This image, when viewed live, creates an optical illusion in the part where there are widespread red floral motifs on the royal blue shade (lower part of the composition). Watching that part live creates the effect of moving details, which is a really interesting experience for observers. This painting is currently in the private collection of collectors from America. (Explained by the artist)

Vintage Family

Vintage Family (100x60). From the royal blue phase, Hanna indulges in the red tone phase. This realization is perhaps the crown of all her works so far when it comes to details.

I wanted to present a composition that this time will include several characters (woman, man, dog, cat), but I also included many intense details in the composition that attract attention. I used gold and bronze pigments, which give the image a special visual effect of screening, and enrich it. Mild but allowed kitsch in the art of painting. The painting is currently in the collection of a collector from America. (Explained by the artist)

Hommage to Matisse – Wind of the Orient

Hommage to Matisse - Wind of the Orient (120x80). As inspiration for this painting, Hanna Dujmović took a lesser-known work by Matisse depicting the family.

My remake of his work contains the making of characters in my own way, and the details of the Bosnian rug with which I wanted to emphasize the area I come from. The motif of the Bosnian carpet gave the composition geometrized details that fit perfectly with the organic and playful details, such a contrast created an interesting work that is an effective. I also use gilding in this piece, as the artist shares.

Judith

Judith (120x80). The first exclusively made portrait composition, as an order by a collector from Lisbon. The goal was to do a remake of Gustav Klimt's work, but with Hanna's own artistic note.

> In my opinion, one of my favorite realizations so far. The portrait looks really grandiose because of the format in which it was made, but also because of the golden details and because of the transparent blue drapery that falls down the body. Artists shared that the red background and green details of the leaves gave an ideal contrast to the portrait that is in the foreground. (Explained by the artist)

Inside the Gypsy Caravan

Inside the Gypsy Caravan (150x100). The inspiration came from an everyday situation.

> Considering that I live in a settlement where many modern Roma live, I came up with the idea to realize the theme of the old Roma people on canvas. From the memory of the scenes of the film whose name I do not remember, I came up with the idea of a Roma caravan, so that this composition would not differ from the previous ones, and I place these characters in a closed environment. One of the few instances where we see a female and a male character together. I wanted to experiment with colors and details in order to approximate the colorful gypsy world. The male character is presented with a guitar while singing. I think that music is something that is closely connected to the Roma people. I enriched the female figure with attributes and played with the creation of the mantle and the contour of the anatomy in the area of the legs, which seems naive, but also provocative from the aesthetical point of view. This is also a painting in which I used various techniques, from contour embossed paints to acrylic paints. What is interesting is that this composition, even in the dark, has a visible golden texture which is gorgeous. (Explained by the artist)

Self-portrait or Frida Kahlo

Self-portrait or Frida Kahlo. This smaller-sized canvas is the last work Hannah realized for this year. She presented her portrait through the character of Frida Kahlo. With this, she wanted to glorify and celebrate all women artists and draw attention to the importance of women in art.

> There is a lot of data on how many fewer works of art created by women artists are sold than by men. My wish is that in the near future the percentages will climb to at least approximate… Certainly, one of the artists, feminists, who contributed to the visibility of women in art is Frida. A lot of people say that my character is associated with her, and some associate my works with Frida. With this work, I opened a new cycle within which I will create more portrait images. (Explained by the artist)

Kyriaki Goni — Examining Complex Relation of Technology and Society**; February 2, 2021**

Kyriaki Goni is a Greek artist born and based in Athens, working across media and focusing on the interaction between technology and society. She is bringing in dialogue in local and global perspective. Through expanded installations and narration, Kyriaki Goni investigates subjects such as the power of information, perception, and construction of the digital self, alternative infrastructures and alternative networks, as well as human machine interaction.

She states that broader dialogue with the audience is vital to her; therefore, includes workshops, talks, and papers/essays, which get presented on conferences and published on journal or online platforms (*Leonardo Journal MIT*, *Melbourne Triennial*). She holds a BA in Visual Arts and an MA in Digital Arts from the Athens School of Fine Arts (2015), where she also obtained a teacher education. Prior to that, she obtained graduate and postgraduate degrees in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology in Athens and in Leiden, Netherlands. Her artistic research gets published (Leonardo MIT; 49:4, Neural #65, etc.), while Goni frequently designs and implements workshops as part of her practice.

She presents work internationally in solo (Aksioma, Drugo More, Onassis Foundation) and group exhibitions (13th Shanghai Biennale, Modern Love, 5th Istanbul Design Biennale, Transmediale, 13,700,000 km^, The Glass Room etc). She is a Delfina Foundation alumna (2019) and a Niarchos Artworks fellow (2018). Her latest work, *Data Garden* (Onassis Stegi, Ars Electronica), received the state prize INSPIRE2020 from the MOMus Experimental Center of the Arts in Greece.

As stated at ONASSIS, in the age of climate crisis, the constant production, accumulation, and storage of data raise important questions regarding their impact on the natural environment. Almost every query, movement, or activity within digital networks requires

the mediation of machine learning algorithms and energy consumption. The storage of data in “clouds” demands heavy technological infrastructures, emitting carbon dioxide that can hardly be reduced. In turn, the function of data centers creates the necessity for new ecologies, whose exclusive goal is the proper maintenance of these infrastructures, depleting or tainting this planet’s natural resources. So, what happens when nature is understood as cheap, disposable, and usable for the needs of technology? Can habits and practices change in a reality that is already mediated by technology? What role can the natural environment and the ‘more-than-human’ worlds play in provoking this change?

The artwork *Data Garden*, by Kyriaki Goni, investigates this set of questions through a fictitious narrative, which is partly based on true facts. The project’s starting point is recent scientific research on the use of the DNA of living beings for the purposes of data storage. According to the premise, a community of users who are sensitized in issues of connectivity, privacy, and the natural environment, resorts to the use of the DNA of a tiny endemic plant that grows on the foothills of the Acropolis, several years after the plant’s extinction. Referring to active oblivion, the community aspires to build a new relationship with technology and nature alike, studying and learning from the latter. Community members keep their personal data in the plants, as organisms that memorize information about the process of photosynthesis, and thus ensure life. As the storage space changes from the “cloud” to the earth, and as control passes from the companies to the users, the life cycle of data follows that of a plant, fostering a relation of interdependence and care. In a peculiar garden, users become the plants’ gardeners, whereas plants respectively become the gardeners of the stored information. Under this new condition, the thoughtless accumulation of data is no longer desired, or even possible. The users not only take decisions over the disposal of their data, but they also bear the responsibility of what is worth being stored and what can or should be deleted.

Data Garden (2020)

The story of a secret data garden that grows in the Acropolis hill unravels in the exhibition space through the installation's different elements. The video is narrated by the artist herself in a personal tone, as if she is addressing someone that she knows and trusts. This rock garden's network of roots is illustrated in a drawing. The intense and thick rootstock depicted alludes to forms of communication and intelligence that are found in nature, but also in horizontally distributed systems of electronic communication. The position of this rhizome on the rock, where the Parthenon can barely be distinguished in the background, seems to challenge the worldview of Western-dominated thought, which approached plants as passive, idle receptors that are found on the bottom of the world pyramid. This kind of approach is represented in Diego de Valadés's *Great Chain of Being* (Didacus Valades's *Rhetorica Christiana*), which the artist comments on with a 'gesture' suggesting a dislocation. The plant of the story, *Micromeria acropolitana*, is revealed through an augmented reality app, reminding us of the role of human agency in species extinction. A ritual sound piece highlights the kinship between humans and plants, and points to cultures where these relationships are understood as uninterrupted. A DNA sequence where data codification is embedded, blown up into a large print, informs about a new hybrid language, one that is currently under development and where the languages of science, daily reality, and nature all meet. The project draws a full circle with a series of interviews with scientists from the fields of biotechnology, genetics, and environmental studies, bringing to the foreground the scientific research that became the basis for the development of the work.

In her piece *Data Garden*, Kyriaki Goni purposefully interweaves fictitious elements and facts. The use of a hypothetical scenario and the appropriation of elements drawn from a scientific discipline that is currently under development invite the audience to reflect upon the possible changes triggered by the leverage of DNA as a storage space. For example, the creation of these new, transgenic organisms is by no means detached from questions of ethics. A new condition under which plants become at the same time perceivable as infrastructures

holds the danger of a new kind of instrumentalization of nature. The appearance of a new category of “living” infrastructures can possibly become an apple of discord in what concerns the control and ownership over them. However, the story of the piece does not aim at naming possible issues or scaremongering. On the contrary, emphasis seems to be given to the reminder of the indissoluble relation between culture and nature, and to the activation of a dialogue on the character and the boundaries of human intervention and activity. Correlating the architectures of technical networks with networks of nature, next to correlating the intelligence and strategies of a community of users with those of a population of tiny plants, the artwork opens up a discussion on heterarchies, multilingualisms, and symbiopolitics. Revealing the connections between digital memory and the climate crisis, *Data Garden* refers to the changes that are feasible before further engineering of nature, while learning from it.

A virtual exhibition tour with artist Kyriaki Goni of her multimedia installation *Data Garden*, followed by a live discussion between artist Kyriaki Goni (GR), Prodromos Tsiavos (GR), Head of Digital & Innovation at Onassis Foundation, and collaborators of the project. Would it be possible for our digital data to be hosted in a garden, in a secret network in the center of the city? Small, invisible plants (known under the scientific name *Micromeria acropolitana*) are planted exclusively on the Acropolis rock and accommodate digital memory in their DNA. The artist creates her own data garden by combining fiction and science.

Through drawings, prints, videos, sound pieces, and interviews with scientists from respective fields, the immersive installation *Data Garden* reveals the connections between digital memory and the climate crisis. Follow the virtual tour in the “garden” of the Onassis Stegi Exhibition Hall and reflect on the limits of human intervention and activity in the environment. The exhibition is part of Ars Electronica 2020 In Kepler's Gardens.

Denis Haračić — Depicting Situation Between Numb Contemplation & Monstrous Dehumanization**; March 3, 2021**

Denis Haračić is a Bosnian and Herzegovinian visual artist based in Sarajevo (BiH). He primarily uses combined techniques of printmaking, drawing, painting and digital installation. Haračić tends to question social structures and identity from both the individual and our group perspective. His seemingly archaic work is based on existential and archetypal principles drawn from an intimate space, moving towards a universal message of bare and exposed humanity. The ideas Haračić is working on manifest themselves in anthropomorphic depictions of psychological situations trapped between numb contemplation and monstrous dehumanization.

His latest international exhibitions are *16/4, Embedded Truth*, an online exhibition created during the COVID-19 lockdown, 2020, *On the Edge*, Stubel Gallery, Sofija, Bulgaria, 2019, and *Museum Of Now*, curated by Denis Leo Hegic, Michelle Houston, Jan Gustav Fiedler and Katia Hermann, Berlin, Germany, 2019. His latest award is Collegium Artisticum Award in the category of printmaking, from the Association of artists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one of the highest-ranking annual art prizes in BiH.

Hana Tiro (HT): I have to go in an alternative direction with my first question – you seem to be developing Plusminus fashion. Could you tell us more about Plusminus, and how it affects your overall creative life path?

Haračić: Plusminus fashion is a project I started working on in 2017. When I was still exhibiting and creating art with my friend and colleague Mirza Rahmanović, we teamed up with designer Ena Dujmović in an attempt to continue her previous work, combining classical printmaking techniques with contemporary fashion design. Mirza and I made 2 collections with Ena, after which I carried on working only with her. In general, the story of Plusminus is one of my biggest successes alongside my art and gallery-focused career. Ena and I managed to punch out a few really interesting collaborations, creating collections with general themes, but always heavily relying on our senses of creating art. Even though it seems to be well planned, Plusminus would not be able to reach the expressive power it possesses without the element of improvisation and a free creative flow. I think Ena and I both know that, so we tend not to bite too far into each other's field of expertise. We merely consult on the possibilities of fusion, treating the clothing like a canvas ready to be overpainted. That routine has paid

off for us so far, winning Plusminus the Big See Award in Ljubljana back in 2019 for the collection *Different Species*. We are working on a new collection as we speak. I am having a lot of studio time carving what is basically the biggest linocut involved in the process so far. You asked me about how this affects my overall creative life path, and I can only say that I enjoy the freshness of Plusminus. Unlike my other studio work, which demands a lot of thinking and questioning, the beauty of Plusminus is that I can let go and focus only on the dance between technique and different possibilities in terms of aesthetics. It feels good to go back to my printmaking roots every once in a while.

MoN is not a white cube. MoN is a black box of the art world.

Museum of Now is home to a cutting-edge collection and the first travelling house exploring trends in contemporary art worldwide. As a travelling museum, MON is constantly on the move – from place to place, understanding cities and working with communities, following its curiosities, discovering and stumbling upon things and real time recording vibrations, amplitudes and trends in contemporary art. The Museum of Now, Berlin edition 2019, was showing a wide collection of installations, site specific artworks, new media, photography, prints and paintings featuring 14 artists. Curated by Denis Leo Hegic, Michelle Houston, Jan Fiedler, and Katia Hermann. Presented by Berlin Art Society, Estrel Berlin. Produced by YES, and… productions. The Museum of Now was presenting 21 aquatint prints combined with painting by Denis Haračić in the main exhibition space and an additional 27 works in his media room. As the youngest artist in the 2019 edition, Haračić`s work generated huge public interest. The author was showing three separate series.

HT: Your work is focused on exposing humans in their individuality as much as a part of the collective. How does the current global situation (pandemic and mass digitalization) affect the human condition?

Haračić: Even though this statement about individuality and group identity has a profound sound to it, I actually like my work to be very subjective, starting out from very intimate thought processes and matter analysis. The pandemic affects us all. I personally have been through a lot of phases, from compulsive cleaner and self-isolator to hypochondriac patient, all the way to points of relief in which the idea of COVID suddenly felt like a distant memory. Now we are back in lockdown, and everything seems to be standing still once again. Well, we can all agree that this crisis lies heavily on our minds, burdening us in a number of different aspects. As an artist, I have to say that I am mostly suffering from the inability to lay out my plans for the year. At this point, I am basically failing at executing projects I have conceived over a year ago. Of course, I am trying to adapt to the situation, but I am also trying to keep the essence of my work in place. I think this is a problem that artists with a more classical, fine art-oriented mindset, such as painters, printmakers or sculptors, are facing to a greater degree. A painting, for

> instance, does not translate as well to a photograph in a 3D virtual space as it does to real life. Sure, we all can and need to explore new approaches in the presentation and communication of our ideas, but in my opinion, art is best consumed live. Although we can look for replacements, as the situation is dragging on, we are in dire loss of that specific touch with reality. And this is not only a problem in the consummation of art, but it also successfully translates back onto all levels of everyday life in 2021. We are deprived of one of our most important and desirable instincts, the human touch. Digitalization in general is challenging our concept of social interactions. Together with the mental and physical impact of life during COVID-19, we are facing a time of great psychological trauma, which will surely leave its debris scattered throughout different aspects of our existence. Hopefully, after all of this, we get to focus on rehabilitating from our temporarily founded mindsets and habits, and start a search for what it is we have lost from a humanistic aspect during this daring period.

16/4, Embedded Truth is an online art exhibition created during self-isolation. The exhibition is set up as an attempt to document the period from the 21st of March to the 18th of April 2020 through a series of evolving, abstract self-portraiture. Rather than pushing the idea of art used as a platform to react to global phenomena, this body of work is dedicated entirely to a personal undertaking, dictated by personal needs and mood swings, unfolding almost randomly. In this case, art is treated as a universal language coming primarily from a very intimate space. Curator Denis Leo Hegić points out:

> Right now, our most important focus has to be to prevent arts and culture from coming to a standstill. Digital viewings are an important tool for this, and the presentation of Denis Haračić´s new series does not suffer from the lack of physical contact at all. On the contrary, the digital representation of the works created new perspectives: the graphic artist depicted himself, resulting in self-portraits that line up like frames in a moving picture. Haračić presents snapshots of a world in a halted time.

> **HT:** Even though last year evolved in an unexpected way, we can plan that 2021 is going to give us similar turnings. Are you having any turns of your own going for 2021?
>
> **Haračić**: As I mentioned earlier, I am already in distress over everything I have roughly planned out for 2021. I have predicted possible delays and unexpected turns, but the uncertainty of this time makes it almost impossible to work on larger projects with institutions, and that's exactly what I have been working towards since the end of 2019. Sadly, if we add the default dispositions of cultural life in the Balkan region, especially Bosnia and Herzegovina, to the equation, chances for success are getting slimmer and slimmer. But not to keep it on the pessimistic side, one thing I can surely say is that I will continue with my work, as I constantly seem to find more and more reasons to pursue ideas and self-implied agendas that formed along the way, especially because of the mentioned circumstances. At least in Bosnia and Herzegovina, you can feel empowered while fighting for the liberation of culture and art as a way of universal communication. For this year, I hope that I get to carry out a very important project dedicated to the

> whole cultural field of this region, and that by doing so, I can set a foundation for something more meaningful, benefiting not only my work and career. I feel like that, despite all conditions, the time is right to do projects which give art and culture an adequate voice in this crazy mess called the Balkans.

Lea Jerlagić — Manifesting the Erotic Divinity**; May 1, 2021**

Lea Jerlagić's creative work is a constant fusion of apparently separated and irreconcilable aspects of reality, different cultures, media of expression, all with the goal of deeper penetration into the mysterious inner world of a human being and his connection to the Universe.

At the moment, she is studying the sacred erotic art of Tantric temples and scriptures. She finds inspiration in her spiritual practice of yoga and tantric, constantly and passionately searching for the ways of integrating revelations into artistic expression. Lea Jerlagić was born in Sarajevo, where she finished most of her formal education. She started attending the Academy of Fine Arts in 2004. But in 2007, she got a scholarship by Chinese Government, so she spent the next two years in China, where she studied Chinese culture, language, and Chinese woodcut, which will leave a significant imprint on her future work.

Jerlagić receives master's degree at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo (2013) with the work entitled *Synaesthesia*. Through it, she studies the phenomenon of transformation of the impulse received through one sense and expressed through another – transforming contemporary dance experience into a form of drawing and Chinese woodcut. She currently works as a Senior Teaching Assistant at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo. Recently, she opened an exhibition *Exaltation* on which she worked together with Alen Tatić, who wrote haiku poetry for the exhibition. It was a perfect combination of poetry with Lea's work, circling the overpowering Asia-inspired motifs. Her materials for making Chinese woodcut are shipped by her friends from the Far East. Jerlagić states:

> I have always loved working on paper material that carries a special subtlety, fragility and beauty just like the human body, and therefore I consider it the perfect base for the works I perform, the Chinese woodcut. I could say that in these abstract lines I find

> embraces that already exist, like the seals of a long-forgotten time, only somewhat visible to the human eye, I try to emphasize them, to reveal them bit by bit, aiding so others can see them…

Lea's Exaltation serves as an inspiring example of how art can capture details subtly, expressing the extraordinary emotional depths and heights of sacred erotic experiences. Her art gives shape to the superior perspective of sensuality, and though the viewer is shown "only" bodies, it invites the viewer to feel the voluptuous rapture of love that far transcends the physical, as it says on her blog. An extraordinary effect that Lea achieves through her technique is the immediate sense of profound intimacy, to such an extent that this necessarily becomes the starting point for viewers exploring her works. We're drawn into a fully developed, conscious, sensual reality where profound, elevated emotions and states are revealed through the beautiful, almost translucent bodies.

Small format entitled simply "3" saluting the divinity in us, acknowledging that the divine is always present when two embrace in the name of Love.

> **HT**: When did you start studying the topics related to erotica?
> **Jerlagić**: I always had an interest in erotica. Although it may sound odd, I remember drawing lovers in my early childhood. However, more serious dealings with the subject began only a few years back. At first, I explored the motive of kisses, and later depicted the full erotic act of making love.
> **HT**: Why the erotic treatments and depictions of surrounding?
> **Jerlagić**: Together with my studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, and later at the Academy in Hangzhou (China), I began to practice yoga and study the spiritual teachings of the Far East, encountering Taoist and Tantric teachings that carry fascinating knowledge. These teachings can help modern man achieve a state of inner balance, so I began to search for artistic expression in which I could convey them. Eros is an important aspect of longevity (in Taoism) and spiritual development (in Tantra), and thus becomes a central theme for me also. After graduating, I started teaching a 'Drawing Nude' class as an assistant at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, where the main motive is also the human body. In this way, I could deepen my research and connect all the interests into a harmonious whole. Slowly, my personal artistic "handwriting" emerged. I am still mastering and perfecting it. *Dreams of Fire* - This is one of the art works inspired by a Chinese text called *Nine Positions of a Dark Girl*, sometimes translated as *Canon of Dark Girl*, with its original title in Chinese *Xuannü jing* (*玄女經*). The manuscript dates back to the Sui period in Ancient China, around the 6th and 7th century and is considered one of the later texts. The precise date of the appearance of this text remains unclear. *Totally Auspicious Drawing* - using ancient Chinese woodblock printing technique to create a unique touch. These abstract shapes

and lines printed on soft Chinese paper guide me while drawing lovers in erotic embraces. Shapes are revealed rather than created. They contain ancient messages hidden in the very fabric of material, of lines and colors. Each line is authentic, charged with personal exploration into the fascinating world of ancient erotic practices.

HT: Do love and erotica go hand in hand? Do both of them appear inside the same space in your works?

Jerlagić: Eros implies love. Modern vulgarization of eros does not. People think that every pornographic depiction of a naked body is erotic, but it is not. Great philosophers, such as Plato and Socrates, wrote about eros. Apuleius reveals in his work *Golden Donkey*, through deep and significant symbolism, the importance of the relationship between eros and the soul in the story "Cupid and Psyche" (in some versions "Eros and Psyche"). I strive deeply to give eros the dignity it deserves and to bring love into each artwork I create. I feel very happy when people recognize (and they do) the spiritual ecstasy of lovers in love that I am depicting.

Aschare Intersection — Street Art Virtuoso**; May 19, 2021**

NN lab presents Aschare Intersection, providing cultural and artistic content, in which artists show their skills in crossfire of music and fine arts. Aschare is an informal association of street artists aware that digitized art forms are solid ways to present creative and innovative ideas to a larger number of target groups and thus raise awareness of art among a population that is increasingly moving away from art — Aschare Design studio, Aschare Tattoo, Aschare Street Wear, Aschare Univerzum, and most unique of all, the Aschare Intersection.

Aschare Intersection invests in the development of culture and art in Sarajevo for the last five years, but it also tends to expand on the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project represents an interdisciplinary approach to art of different orientations, such as music and street art. Aschare Intersection is creating space for cultural and artistic content, giving young and talented artists an opportunity to present their skills. The team of people who have been implementing similar projects related to culture and art for many years, want to bring together individuals and groups who represent the pioneers of sub cultures. They created various events much earlier and in much more difficult post-war conditions and started initiatives that over time grew into serious and unique projects, and left a significant mark and influenced the development of the cultural and artistic scene of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

> Today is marked by the rise of kitsch and banality, as well as the tendency to degrade the values of culture and art, which certainly has an impact on the development of new generations. Often, this impact is not positive, and for this reason we believe that quality art projects are something that our society lacks. (Explained by the artist)

One of the Aschare's products is a video clip of the entire process of the organization, and the event itself subsequently published on various web platforms such as social networks, as well as YouTube channels. This way, the project activities are perpetuated, as well as the promotion of artists participating in the project, and ultimately the location where the events take place, which can have a very positive impact on promoting Sarajevo as a new Europe's and world center of urban culture and art.

Aschare is simultaneously connecting artists in a location of historical, cultural and artistic significance, and thus provides them with a unique ambience in expressing their artistic skills. They are accompanied with equipment for recording audio and video material, which is further edited and prepared for distribution to the general public through various digital media. It aims to promote music and art culture in society, which is created in a unique atmosphere, as well as the promotion of artists and works of art created in an interdisciplinary manner. The long-term goal of the project is to create greater interest and understanding of young people, and the general population about alternative arts. Aschare offers quality alternatives to kitsch.

Aschare intersection is a unique project, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but in the region and the world, which seeks to rebrand events in the field of culture and art, creating a new form of artistic expression that arises from the synergy of different types of artistic activity. Prominent goals of the Aschare Intersection project are the promotion of culture and art, advocacy for marking and marking sites of cultural and historical significance, as well as the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of diversity.

In the long run, the project aims to raise interest and awareness of young people about alternative directions in art, and offer them alternative content from established kitsch and the banality they are used to in their daily lives.

Nejra Turčinović — Artist Masked as Civil Engineer**; June 21, 2021**

Nejra Turčinović is an engineer and artist born in Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. As stated on her website, she is Master of Civil Engineering who thinks in code, plays in design and is in love with illustration. Simple formula of her skills is XYZ, X - design, Y - illustration, Z - web development. Aside from creativity, engineering, drawing, writing, and reading, Nejra has strong opinion and will to fight for environmental and ecological well-being.

Nejra Turčinović says that she finds her inspiration in everyday life. She still thinks of herself as being a child, collecting toys, figures, reading books and comic books, watching animated movies etc. "I find my inspiration in children because they are the best dreamers and imagination creators. As I said before, I am still a child. I love to dream, imagine and create. You must think like a child when you draw for them.", as the artist states. Nejra has her online bookmarks shop called Tefterić. Mission of Tefterić is to protect, prevent, cover up, decorate, show and prove that books look better with TEFTER bookmarks.

> A TEFTER is actually more than just a bookmark. It's something you use to mark the place when reading a book – but it's also an educational illustration reminding us of amazing human beings who have contributed their knowledge, science and art of our planet and beyond. And we must always teach others about them because they remain everlasting inspirations to humankind. This is a collection of 24 illustrations of such personalities; says the author.
>
> I am a type of a person who always has everything planned and all in place. Organization makes working process much easier. Sometimes people ask me if I regret for choosing my profession. Well, no, I am a Master of Civil Engineering but creative one at the same time. I work at a college as a teaching assistant, and do everything I love - science, gadgets, technology and outreaching activities to promote healthy environment. I always learn new things, meet new people and do great projects. I don't like system in which you always do just one thing, and things that someone instructs. I love my freedom and having continuous professional and creative development opportunities; Nejra states.

Vrpca — Music & Filmmaking — Old School Magic**; July 23, 2021**

Band Vrpca is from Podgorica, Montenegro, and they've been around since 2012, although in music for longer than that: Braco Subotic (vocals), Milos Pejovic (guitar), Stefan Pantovic (guitar), Danilo Pendo (bass), Zarija Pavićević (drums), Ivan Ivanović (drums). Now there are only three active members, but soon, the things will change.

> There are always certain obstacles, such as new tasks facing us, almost like a test of endurance and sobriety. Album will be released for the "Stivi Music" label. The festivals for this year have bypassed us a bit but there will be a couple more during the summer, so let's hope it works out and maybe we'll visit some.", the band states. "Seems that this is what we've been looking for, given to us, on this planet, the beautiful Earth. Since our environment was not very rich in r'n'r, the road was long and thorny. Anyway, we've been through a good portion of it and are constantly pacing. To the last breath. Pandemics added to our weight the imposed or forced heaviness, with which conscious people have to cope. We recorded an album of 9 songs. It's titled *Oko Sfere*. The question of the day is when it will come out, the alternative has never become Hollywood.

Last year the band Vrpca finalized their documentary *Vrpca at Stevie* and screened it at two short-form festivals - Underhill and Rokumentarni Dani. It describes the creative process of the band in the studio, the approach to the matter itself. It will follow the whole, the debut album. Since they don't have an agent or a manager, they do everything DIY, mainly because they love what they do. Then even the hardest days will not be hard enough. Because everyone wants success or a recognition. And that is quite human. A finish, an end. Finality.

> **HT**: Have you defined your genres, what is the creative process behind that?
> **Vrpca**: The tape, in principle, plays Alt-Rock. It is essentially a fusion of several directions and it is an explosive form, in the end. The admixture of crossover and dream pop make that compact dreamy singing, on the verge of a recital, becomes thunderous in moments, letting out a scream
> ("…one scream does it all...") The guitar floats endlessly and conquers over a solid rhythm section. The inspiration is inexhaustible so we create songs together. Everyone has that key, that screw. We sing about freedom and the fight against injustice, every kind of nonsense. Celebrating life.
> **HT**: You were active during the pandemic, have you had moments of suspicion and doubt?
> **Vrpca**: The pandemic has taken out of us everything that is possible for some specific reason in an instant found silence. As if waiting for a call from the vis major. Well, that's exactly what happened. We rode the issue and being careful and reasonable

went for mantras and to the source of creativity, which is in the community. Like family. We worked diligently all year and saved the material. Made a movie. We didn't suspect a crumb.

HT: How do you react to the possibility of online concert, or general digitalization?

Vrpca: We are not carried away by that form, in short. Live contact, symbiosis, is necessary. Humans, priceless creatures in a hatch with a performer. Online gigs are tempting at first but that feeling is very quickly replaced by an insatiable desire for contact and the inevitable exchanging of energy. We keep our fingers crossed, vernacularly said, that things will become normal again.

Benjamin Dizdarević — A Visionary Filmmaker**; August 16, 2021**

Benjamin Dizdarević is a filmmaker born in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1992, but almost all of his life spent in Sweden. When he turned 18, he decided to study film in his hometown, at the Sarajevo Film Academy/film.factory. Benjamin studied film for three years, but decided to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a plan to make more movies in his home country. But it all took an unexpected turn, because Benjamin's application for master's degree at Academy of Performing Arts was declined. From eleven applicants, he was the only one who didn't enroll. After this, Benjamin talked to Danis Tanović, Oscar-winning director, and Tanović told him that this is a perfect thing because now he has no excuses not to make movies. Thus, it began. One of the first Dizdarević's movies *Rez* (Cut). It is about a film enthusiast Jasmin Dodik and his life story of traveling around the Balkans, screening movies for free. We see his journey from the very beginning, the ex-Yugoslav era, to his continuation of the process during the Balkan wars in the 90's, as well as the post-war era in Bosnia. The movie discusses the future of the 35mm film reel now that the digital era is slowly taking over.

HT: Who was your first inspiration? From where did this filmmaking urge emerge?

Dizdarević: To be honest, I didn’t even know I wanted to be a filmmaker until my first real movie, after I graduated from film school. During film school, I had plenty of contrasting inspirations, depending on which mood I was for the day: Lars von Trier, Paul Thomas Anderson, Coen Brothers and so on. I was a young wanna-be provocateur who probably liked the image of a filmmaker more than filmmaking itself. It might sound harsh, but those are probably the words I’d tell myself if I could go back in time. But the one inspiration that made me begin my filmmaking career? My mom. See, after high school, I had gotten into the psychology program in Richmond, England. I was

convinced that “this is what I’m supposed to do”. But one day, out of the blue, my mom calls me while I was visiting my dad in Germany and says “Hey, there’s a film school in Bosnia. You’ve always liked film. Wanna give it a shot?”. And my reaction was “Film school? What do you mean, we sit around and watch movies all day?” and she’s like “No silly, they teach you how to make them.” I was sold. And so, my journey began. I packed my bags and flew to Bosnia instead. These were years of uncertainty, up until the point I had my first budget to make a movie. So, I made the documentary film *Cut*, which was screened at international film festivals all over the world and eventually sold to Al Jazeera Balkans. Five days of filming. 12-hour shifts. Last day was 16 hours + 2-hour drive home. My crew were destroyed, lying in the van falling asleep. My eyes were excitedly open. Red and bloody, sure, but open. That’s when I knew I wanted to be a filmmaker.

HT: Who would be your favorite film director, and why?

Dizdarević: Nowadays, I tend to look at movies independently from their creator. Having a favorite filmmaker is hard for me to imagine. It left a bad taste in my mouth when the younger me used to worship certain creators and aspire to be like them instead of being myself. But to avoid giving an anti-climactic answer, I’ll put it this way: The filmmaker that lit the bulb over my head and made me go “I think I know what kind of movies I want to make” for the first time ever, was Asghar Farhadi. I liked movies on both sides of the spectrum back then: Slow and artsy but also good, stable Hollywood. With Farhadi, it’s as if he took both sides and merged them together. Complex, profound stories made easy to watch. That’s probably the closest to an inspiration as I’ll get right about now.

HT: Did directing change your world view? As in, do you see a house merely as a building made of bricks, or as someone's potential home filled with stories, or maybe something else?

Dizdarević: Filmmaking in general definitely has made me look at the world differently. Everything has become a story now. Even the most mundane boring tasks that people do each day are a story to me. Just to take your example of buildings: They are a collection of bricks if you want to look at it that way. Boring, sterile but serve an important function. But maybe it’s not about the building. Maybe it’s about the ties that people have to the building and the place around it. Yes, you can look at it and go “Oh… bricks”. But to Ivan, who lived there 40 years ago and cultivated the best memories of his childhood? You bet it’s more than “just bricks”. Anybody who’s gone on a nostalgia trip and visited their childhood home knows the power of that feeling. It’s disgustingly nauseating. Makes you sick to your stomach. But boy does it come with a feeling of satisfaction on top of it. Am I the only one…? Point is, everybody lives for something. Therefore, everybody and everything has a story. There are no bad stories. Only bad storytellers.

HT: When you first got your hands on the camera, where did you aim it?

Dizdarević: Aimed it at my cousin sitting by the kitchen table. He placed playing cards on his eyes, squinting them to hold them in place, and filled his mouth with more cards, making him look like a monstrous card-creature with large card-teeth. I don’t know, I can’t explain it better than that. It was stupid. We laughed. A part of me wishes we could have put make up on him too so that he would’ve become a… Card-ashian. I’ll see myself out.

HT: In photography, what's your favorite style?

Dizdarević: Simple, pure, realism. Street photography in most cases. But the stylized ones aren’t bad either. In that case, playing with a simple light and see what you can accomplish is pretty fun. The simpler, the better.

HT: Any advice for young filmmakers?

Dizdarević: Stop performing. You're wasting your time. Nobody is going to appreciate you for "being a character" when you're sitting at home doing absolutely nothing to achieve your goals. Cut down on the parties, and instead put in the work. Sit. Read. Watch. Create. And after that – develop an eye for business. You will be a "poor artist" if you expect the work to come to you instead of chasing it. The "poor artist" stereotype is overrated, sorry. You have no excuse to not earn money from your passion in 2021. So, get to work.

Benjamin currently works as a filmmaker and photographer in Stockholm, Sweden, where he founded his own production company Dizdarević Film.

Future Yugoslavia — Experimental Documentary on the Balkans**; September 13, 2021**

Future Yugoslavia is a YouTube channel intended to share and discuss different documentary, border-documentary and regular non-documentary original TV series and shows created by Kaja Šišmanović and Matija Hajdarhodžić. Fourteen series, projects of all kinds, are scheduled to air on the channel.

"Real documentary series (the ones you have to watch in a particular order) are almost an obscure format, particularly on YouTube, but we believe, predict even, a bright future for the format, again; particularly on YouTube! Everything we publish is neatly subtitled in English." (Explained by the artists)

HT: Would you tell us something about yourselves?

Kaja: I'm 27 years old, although I feel (and look) much younger, like I'm still not a grown-up. That makes my life fun but a bit hard, like I still don't have the means to accomplish the things I want. I studied film direction, but ended up living off of acting, which is much easier to get paid for, in Croatia, at least. I've lived my whole life in Zagreb and now I'm getting quite sick of it, makes me sad and angry seeing so much unused potential in my beautiful hometown. I would like to develop my music skills more, I find very much joy in playing any instrument except the violin, for which I went to school, and also would like to gain some courage to start singing more freely. I love watching movies, I do often fall asleep before they end (I heard that's not so uncommon for girls, don't know why), but never if I get really hypnotized by them. I would like to write about films, but rarely I find time, I would love to direct stuff with some budget, I would like to push my philosophy/physics theories to a level higher than just scribbling some oneiric ideas.

Matija: I'm searching for more in life than life itself. Maybe not particularly active at the moment, but never forgot the search. That and trying to do stuff other people don't, like Future Yugoslavia.

HT: When and how did you come up with the idea for Future Yugoslavia?

Kaja: Future Yugoslavia as a syntagm was just a wordplay, those two words are almost antonyms – Yugoslavia is forever a term relating to the past, so adding 'Future' to

it was our joke. We came up with it many years ago, so when we opened our google account, we randomly named it that. Only last spring we got the idea for a Youtube channel, we were stuck at home because of the pandemic, bored and itchy to work on something, so we agreed to edit all the footage that was sleeping on our hard drives and publish it by ourselves, after many failed attempts that included production houses and televisions. We already had that google account from many years ago, so we used it, and the legend of FTY was born in the meantime, it turned out nothing is accidental (as it usually does turn out), so the name and the substance of the channel aligned so good and created so much more meaning than we ever could imagine.

Matija: It was occurring gradually. First came the name. It was such a cool, significant and unused name we knew we had to do something under it. Then corona came, made us be home, have time, look at the old hard drives full of documentary material. Documentary series! That was the conclusion, Future Yugoslavia a perfect fit, particularly since the first series we chose to do was a travelogue through that same still existing, non-ex-Yugoslavia, even talking about it within the series.

First episode of first series

Kaja and Matija decided to make a film about the refugee wave for which it would be necessary to travel at least to Greece. But Matija was in Dubrovnik and Kaja in Šid so they decided to meet in Sarajevo and start their trip from there. In Sarajevo, they ended up in an apartment rented by five guys. One of them, Raif, decided to join them in their endeavor. Raif never traveled before, he'd never seen the sea, he'd never rode the train. They created the crowdfunding campaign the same day and set to take the 2PM bus to Podgorica tomorrow afternoon. The next morning, Raif went to his hometown, Olovo, to pick up some stuff. They were supposed to meet at noon at a café where his brother Semir works. But Raif was an hour and a half late so there was no chance to get that bus. Raif also changed his mind about leaving today, he now plans to stay for a couple days more to get some money and then race alone to catch up with them... Like that would work. What now?

HT: Although pandemic struck us, you kept working actively and producing your creative plans. How did you manage to keep it going?

Kaja: As I said, pandemic was the reason for our productiveness, we did not want to spend it just getting high and drinking coca cola, in it, we saw our chance for dedicated work with no outside world distractions.

Matija: Oh but, as I just said, we only started it during corona. The real question here is will we manage to keep working on it after the pandemic finishes… But we will! Besides, both series we aired so far were shot long, long before all that and so is the one we plan to air next, so real ‘shoot and edit’ production is yet to be seen.

HT: You tackle social constructs, talk about injustice, dive into the undergrounds, the less known parts of the society. Do you ever feel unsafe on your missions? How do you return to everyday life?

Kaja: This might sound cheesy, but I never feel unsafe with Matija by my side. We've been together for seven years now and we had quite a lot of adventures, most of which weren't even filmed! I always had a passion, longing even, for an exciting, hazardous way of life, since I was little, so our missions bring me excitement, mostly. Even in some dangerous situations, I'm confident we'll get out of them, the question is only how. It's a bit like playing a video game for me. And our everyday life is often quite adventurous, we have no daily jobs, often no place to live either, so our survival is always a strategy.

Matija: Everyday life is a mission! No way back, only forward.

First episode of second series

"ESTRAGON: What did we do yesterday? VLADIMIR: What did we do yesterday? ESTRAGON: Yes. VLADIMIR: Why... Nothing is certain when you're about. ESTRAGON: In my opinion we were here." (Shared by the artist)

HT: You traveled a lot this summer, mostly through the Balkans. Any awards, festivals, shows you'd like to highlight and talk about?

Kaja: We had a good summer, shot a documentary film that has to do with traveling and Balkans and festivities... But don't want to spoil it, it's going to be finished and out hopefully this winter.

Matija: Nope. We were shooting something I can't talk about without containing spoilers.

HT: What are your plans for the future?

Kaja: We have many, many plans, so many that we have work to do for some 30 years.... Those are mostly movie plans, but we also plan to tackle science and politics.... In the end, we would be happy to have a complete universe created by the two of us.

Matija: Ah! The future is so long… There are fourteen series on our program so far, you can find the full list both on our Facebook and on our Instagram. Since they are getting more and more expensive, we plan to crowd fund them after the third one. Also, get ready for our music production! We will open a second, film channel when we reach 5000 subscribers on Future Yugoslavia.

Adnan Bajrović — We Want to Turn Dreams into Reality, and Reality Sometimes Seems Like a Dream**; September 25, 2021**

HT: *Kosmičke šetnje tastaturom* (eng. Cosmos walks through keyboard) is your poetic debut. How long have you been writing, ie. from which writing periods were your poems included in the collection?

Bajrović: The collection took a long time to create, but at the beginning I did not intend to write poems to fit into a book, they were more the way I expressed some thoughts that tormented me and occupied my thoughts. It wasn't until later that I got the idea for a poetry collection when material piled up. Mostly a good part of the collection,

at least seventy percent of the songs have been created in the last year and a half. One or two poems are from my early stage of writing poetry, 3-4 years ago. For example, the song "The Last Tram" is the oldest in this selection. Classes are for one regional competition for World Poetry Day, which took fourth place. On the other hand, I wrote the song "Why I Write" maybe a week before the book went to press. All the songs were written during the so-called 'transition period' after graduating from college and finding a job. During a period of numerous rejections, numerous obstacles, work on oneself, loneliness, fight against depression and anxiety, which is why poetry used to be the only way to endure it all.

HT: Your poems enter the surreal realms, borders between dreams and reality. Is that how you see objects in your reality, or is that the way you interpret the world?

Bajrović: I'm a classic overthinker. When I think about something, it sometimes exceeds all limits of reality and possibilities. But that's the way life is, isn't it? We want to turn dreams into reality, and reality sometimes seems like a dream, even if it was a nightmare. Poetry has this power to bridge the gap between dream and reality. It has the power to talk about something that is cosmic, surreal, unreal, and yet to be private, individual, inherent, worldly. On the other hand, my writing is greatly influenced by science and nature (especially physics, astronomy and similar sciences), and everything related to them encourages man to romantic fantasies, ecstasy, fear and passion, which I write about - relationship between man and nature, man and cosmos, micro and macrocosm, reality and dream, and so on. What do I know, I seek my peace in a truly turbulent world.

HT: If you were writing about any other city, what city would it be?

Bajrović: It could be any city, if I got the chance to feel it, experience it, breathe it. Sarajevo (buildings, people, mentality, etc.) is the place of action and the lyrical subject of many of my works because I have been anchored there since birth. But I like to write about other locations as well. I research them more precisely by writing about them. I am currently working on a manuscript in which the main character, originally from BiH, resides in Boston. And in that manuscript, together with him, I discover and learn about the city - its culture, history, architecture, mentality. I like that Boston has a lot in common with English culture which is also very interesting to me, apart from its literary classics.

HT: Where do you write?

Bajrović: In my room, on my PC. If a neighbor drills, then I write about him with headphones on my head.

HT: You also founded a website; can you tell us a bit more about it?

Bajrović: I started E-volucija with my brother out of some revolt, dissatisfaction, disappointment. These emotions were caused by several bad experiences with a couple of Sarajevo portals and organizations that swore to advocate for culture and young artists, and then did nothing. No culture, no youth, just politics and other accompanying activities. So, we decided to launch a portal that will focus on the things we grew up on. Without politics and similar things that kill all happiness in people. At E-volucija, we write about things that have greatly shaped our childhood and lives, about the popular culture that made up the lives of children during the ’80s, ’90s and '00s. These include video games, contemporary science, comics, computers, science fiction, movies in general, and literature. On the other hand, we try to write as much as possible about the artistic or technological creations of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the creators. Sometimes it is difficult to publish everything timely, because we work with limited capacities, without finances and so on, but we do our best. During 2020, we had two projects that we implemented only with helping hand that came to the rescue. The first was the *Poetry Against the Corona*, project that took place during the first lockdown.

Then we published the poetry of young poets from BiH. The second project was a solo exhibition by the artist Lana Miličić, which was inspired by self-isolation, and had a paper and digital edition.

HT: Do you have plans to move further with e-evolution?

Bajrović: Both my brother and I have a few ideas of what we would like to do with E-evolution. These ideas are worked out, shaped, cooked. As I recently got a job on another portal, it slowed down a bit, but we won't stop. We have a goal that we want to achieve and we will do our best to achieve it. Maybe as early as 2022.

HT: Which literary genre do you enjoy the most?

Bajrović: I enjoy everything, really. Although sometimes I criticize some things more than others, I am a true film lover and book lover. And even when it comes to bad ones. I am always guided by one sentence that I heard while I was still studying: "Sometimes you have to read a bad book, just enough to see how serious and difficult work writing is." Lately, though, I have to admit, I enjoy books that belong to the new weird genre the most. It's a subgenre of science fiction as they rank it in the world, but it's not just that. Although it is most often present in works of science fiction, it can also be found in many other works of fiction. Moreover, the roots of the genre can also be found in Kafka, but more on that some other time. If anyone wants to discover something more, I would recommend the novels of Jeff Vandermeer and China Miéville.

HT: Are you currently working on a new manuscript?

Bajrović: I have one ready; I am bringing the other to an end and preparing the ground for the third. It's not a trilogy; it's all different stories and themes. Writing is what I do, what I want and what I will do forever. We will see if any of this will be published, either digitally or in print.

Vanja Šunjić — Both Women and Men Writers Speak Openly and Uncompromisingly**;**

October 9, 2021

HT: The collection is written around a very personal event – divorce of the parents, father's mistress, mother's suffering. Have you encountered any insecurities before publishing your work? In terms of, how people might react to you personally?

Šunjić: The micro-stories from the collection started coming out as Facebook statuses in 2018 and even then, I saw how the audience reacted to it, polarized by taking the sides of certain heroes and heroines and trying to find something biographical and similar to my life in it. It didn't bother me too much back then, because back then it was statuses, and now it's a literary work, and therefore it's fiction, intertwined with mine, the experience of my mother and women around us. The story is very universal, circular, I would say. The introduction says that every unhappy family is unhappy in its way and that every love triangle is identical.

HT: There are certain dates on each excerpt. What do they represent? Date of the event, or date you wrote down the event, or something else?

Šunjić: We added dates later. Since the book was published by the Književna Zadruga, I had the privilege of playing with form and content. No one was holding me back and asking why that was so. That is why the book is very multimedia. We added the dates when we put together the narrative flow because the fragments were not created in the order in which they were arranged in the book. I think that they helped to read and understand the text, but that they also gave it beauty, style, and even infantilism.

HT: The form of the collection is pretty different from the regular prose or poetry collection we usually have. In couple of sentences, you had to inform the reader about a certain event that took place. Was the process, thus, harder or easier?

Šunjić: At first, the process was pretty straightforward, since by posting statuses on Facebook I wasn't aware I was writing literature. Later, all this had to be leveled and a voice created that would retell all these events, but in a different language, more reduced, more infantile, and more poetic. I was endlessly helped in this by the editor Alen Brlek, with whom I went through the whole process.

HT: Organization Književna Zadruga is developing fast-paced. As one of the founders, do you have some kind of a plan, what is happening next?

Šunjić: So far, we have visited Zagreb twice, Belgrade, Banja Luka, Mostar, and Sarajevo. What we are planning by the end of the year regarding promotions are Ljubljana, Maribor, Podgorica and Skopje. As for other activities, by the end of the year, we want to publish at least one more book by a cooperative member and we are considering a performance for November 25th.

HT: Are you currently working on anything new? (here I mean books, poetry collections, etc.)

Šunjić: I started writing a novel, which was simply put in the background by the events of my life somewhere, and I returned to poetry completely unexpectedly. We'll see what I complete sooner.

HT: I would love to be gender-neutral here, but female writers sometimes struggle with being perceived too light or too crude, and never enough. Can you comment on that?

Šunjić: It is very difficult to fight in a masculine patriarchal society, especially in the domain of frameworks that question precisely the relations of that society from the purgatory of a woman, mother, daughter, friend, sister, etc. On the one hand, you constantly get the label of a frustrated woman and on the other hand, your writing is characterized as a woman's letter, which is a priori less important and relevant and is something that causes pity. It is important that we, the authors, constantly fight against it. What is commendable is the fact that on the literary scene of common cultural space, we have both women and men who understand this issue and speak openly and uncompromisingly against it, while writing extraordinary literature.

Zlata Hodžić — I Wish for My Work to Be Various**; October 23, 2021**

Zlata Hodžić is a photographer from Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, who started her art journey more than a decade ago. She developed herself in fields of portrait photography and landscape photography. Zlata currently works and evolves her skills in Sarajevo, but quite frequently travels in a search for new and rousing environment.

HT: Photography is an art you've been focused on for more than a decade. In which ways have you developed your skills, or styles?

Hodžić: I like to think that I'm constantly developing, I try different styles, work with different people, I wish for my work to be various, and I always love to hear my models' ideas.

HT: Is there a change in your attitude when you work with people vs when you sit down alone and edit photography?

Hodžić: Not too much, if I enjoyed the shoot I'll enjoy the editing too. Also, I like to focus on each photo separately.

HT: How do you come up with the ideas for the photoshoots? There are many different ones in your portfolio.

Hodžić: Inspiration is something you can find everywhere. Sometimes I'm just scrolling Pinterest and see something I like, then try to recreate it in my own way, or I just see a place, item, vibe I like, and come up with the photoshoot idea.

HT: You are very active when it comes to travel and nature photography. Did you have certain projects or collaborations?

Hodžić: I love to travel, either somewhere in the nature or the city, but I'm not very much interested in all the influencer trends, so I do it for my own soul. Maybe in the future I'll have a travel blog - I'm saying that for five years already. (laughter)

HT: You had two exhibitions in six months. Tell us something more about that.

Hodžić: The first one was focused on the young actors. Most of them were still students on Academy of Performing Arts Sarajevo when we did the photoshoots, and I did it together with my friend, who was making all the posters for their plays. The exhibition was a part of Museum of Literature and Performing Arts project. For the second exhibition I picked few photos from almost all photoshoots I did until this summer, and it was a part of Art Kvart at Artiona gallery. I really enjoyed both of them and can't wait for the next one.

HT: What are you planning for your next exhibition?

Hodžić: I don't like to talk too much about my projects until I have everything ready, but I can say that the next one will be different from the last two, and probably all in black and white.

HT: Creativity can be a mess when the world is on hold. How are you coping with COVID-19 pandemic?

Hodžić: The lockdown period wasn't so bad for me, I focused on still life photography more, and had free time to get back to painting. Also, I took a lot of self-portraits, but I'm glad that everything's going back to normal now.

HT: Do you have any particular thoughts or advice you want to share with the readers of Balkan Art Scene?

Hodžić: The best advice I can give to other people, young artists, is to be 100% confident in yourselves and your work. There will be ups and downs, and one unsatisfying photoshoot doesn't mean you're bad. Sometimes you are not on the same levels with model and that's ok, but when you find the people you love to work with, it will give you even more 'wings'. Do what you love.

Dalibor Dado Ćetković — A Dream as a Meeting Place, a Borderline Place of Worlds**;**

November 1, 2021

HT: In your biography it is stated that your father taught you the basics of drawing. Could you tell us more about that? If there is more relation to your arts and your father?

Ćetković: I started learning the first steps with my father, who was a painter and a merchant by profession. In the basement of the house there is a space that then served as a pantry, workshop and father's studio. Even today, the same space is intended for work, that is, my studio. There, after his job, he came to work, whether he was painting or doing something, so I always came to watch and study. He was very creative and I was so interested in everything from the beginning to the end. I started painting on canvas with my father when I was less than six years old. I also got acquainted with all the drawing and painting materials and worked in all the techniques. Watching something from the device get fixed, I learned all about the tools. I am proud that today I can do almost all the work myself, and especially that I already knew a lot about painting with the beginning of school. My father was the first to believe that one day I would realize myself as an artist. In the sixties of the last century, he didn't have the support of his father, so he directed him to trade precisely because of those famous words that one cannot make a living from art. Although at that time the Montenegrin art scene greatly developed and set numerous names, our people didn't give enough attention, unlike other developed countries. I was lucky to be born in some, until then, slightly better period for our area when it comes to fine arts. I learned the most from my father, starting from how to hold a pencil properly in my hand, all the way to drawing objects correctly and building a composition, using colors and ways of painting, etc. From fifth grade, I started selling my paintings that many were amazed at and didn't believe that child was painting. I was persistent in that and I progressed every year. It was very interesting for me to observe how he painted with ease, and in a free way, in the manner of an impressionist, and I wanted to convey as many details as possible and be as close as possible to a realistic depiction. I tried all the techniques and styles, so I experimented and searched for years. Sooner or later, everyone finds themselves sometime in life. It is important to work and everything will come by itself.

HT: Your latest work is a series named Dream in a Dream, is it a concept similar to maybe E.A. Poe's A Dream Within a Dream, or does it go far beyond that?

Ćetković: Interestingly, most of the paintings created in the Antares cycle have the opportunity to develop their own separate path in my creative world. Thus, the painting Dream in a Dream was the first to set a path for itself this year, because I continued to paint dreams, so I ended up with a new exhibition named after that painting, and I was inspired by his song of the same name because it talks about transience of life. This work was created as a painted fragment of my dreams, that is, out of a desire to present an interesting moment in a person's life, and that is a dream as a meeting place, a borderline place of worlds. With this painting I represent a passage in dreams, a passage that is in the whirlpool of life events from the distant past as well as future ones. Like a passage through time. New paintings that have developed and follow the same poetics are: *Dream Tunnel*, *Hurricane of Thought*, *Birds of Paradise*, *Dolphin*, *Above the City* and others. I do not enter the description and I don't leave myself to chance, but I skillfully direct the flow of my creative thought, that is, my dream, woven from the words of the visual language. Using graphic effects as my advantage and not as a craft trick, I manage to build my world on that contrast, at the same time decomposing it now by drawing, now by painting, as in a dream. In painting, I want to express mobility, the movement of a line of drawings, images, surfaces, insisting on fine art, making a colored filter with which I make clear cuts, delimiting the fields of different techniques, images and drawings.

HT: Your interests range from painting to sculpting to photography... Do different mediums provoke different views on the world?

Ćetković: I can say that different media only serve me to present the idea in a different form. For me, it is connected in some way. When I am painting, I recognize

something inside work that may not be visible to everyone, so I try to present it in a piece of wood or stone. It often happens that I fill my walks with interesting photos. There will be some documentaries, although they are not reckless, but I'm mostly focused on finding answers in nature. I most often find portraits and human figures shaped by nature that actually send us messages about time and existence. I almost don't use photos as the main motive for the painting at all, but the memories of those interesting moments inspire me to start a painting that goes further in its direction.

HT: For more than a year now, we've been living virtual lives. Have you been impacted by these changes, in terms of your creativity?

Ćetković: Virtual life has already greatly accustomed us to the new opportunities it provides, even long before the pandemic. It is of great benefit to artists because it is the easiest and fastest way for art to reach as many fans as possible, but also those who do not have the habit of visiting exhibitions. Our studios are open with visits to many social networks where there is a huge number of users, so I believe that it is interesting for many to see what the artist is doing. Since new works can be presented quickly, the desire to create increases, so productivity is higher, and creativity also develops in the desired directions. It is necessary for the artist to be in isolation because then he is closest to himself and his creative view of the world. However, the pandemic has largely captured all other people on the planet, so art has been deprived in some way and therefore many do not care because it is logical that health is the most important. In that sense, I wanted to show a different and more beautiful world, so no heavy content can be found within my works that would additionally burden already burdened people. My paintings aim to motivate and elevate the human spirit to a much higher level, above all the problems of today that we face at every step.

HT: Anything more you would like to add?

Ćetković: I must add that it is of great importance that everyone works on themselves. We have to evolve in every way because it is extremely important for the progress of our civilization. Man, as well as artist, should keep up with the times and strive to progress every day. If everyone does not know himself, it is impossible for him to understand others, including art.

BalkansBurekBoozeBooks — The Appeal Lies in Nostalgia**; December 3, 2021**

HT: The concept of your community is based in London but focused on the Balkans. How did you start this idea?

Tamara Vujinović: The idea for the event started out quite spontaneously. I originate from the ex-Yugoslav region and have always had a strong relationship with the Balkans, from annual visits to the area to a borderline obsession with its music, film, food, etc. During the pandemic, I began to write articles on different themes in regard to the Balkans and became involved with platforms such as 'Balkanism' and 'Asfar'. This period of time really piqued my interest in the region (in a much broader manner) and I began to think of the richness of our culture, the immense Balkan diaspora in London, and how great it would be if there were more opportunities for us to come together. With the collaboration of Morocco Bound Bookshop in Bermondsey, I organized my first event, advertised quite simply as 'Balkans, Burek, Booze, Books.'

HT: What kind of events are you focused on?

Vujinović: Our first event was the result of bringing together a variety of guest speakers to speak on their work as well as issues pertinent to the Balkans past, present, and future. This included Ksenija Kadic; who spoke on her journey of migration and her

work within the mental health sector and Enna Kebo; who spoke of the importance of environmental/ecological preservation in Montenegro and the wider region. We were also joined virtually by Selver Ucanbarlic from Mahala Magazine, a DIY publication filled with stories about the people living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond. As well as guest speakers, we had a photography exhibition of Tom Barlow Brown's work, readings of Balkan literature and poetry, and burek provided by the incredible Spasia Dinkovski (the face of MysticBorek.) The general idea is to bring people together in discussions of prevalent issues faced by the region alongside a celebration of its cultural diversity and creativity.

HT: Is there a certain nostalgic vibe towards the Balkans, or are the people just wanting to hear and see more Balkan content?

Vujinović: I would say it very much depends. I think for many, the appeal lies in nostalgia whether that be someone who is directly from the region and misses a sense of home or a second-generation immigrant who seeks ways to strengthen their knowledge or enjoyment of Balkan culture. I know that for me and for many of the attendees it is the latter- creating a sense of community and enjoyment for all was therefore really important to me. Not all of the attendees were of Balkan descent either so I think mainly people are just interested in the region and want to find out more! Our mission for the events is therefore to provide a means of platforming Balkan creativity, inciting healthy discussion, and forging community.

HT: What are you planning next for BalkansBurekBoozeBooks?

Vujinović: The future will see many different types of events divided along alternative types of engagement (rather than trying to fit it all in on the same night!) This could mean events dedicated solely for music/dancing/eating purposes or more sit-down discussions of important themes and issues but you will have to wait and see! We have some exciting news coming up so be sure to follow @balkansburekboozebooks on Instagram to stay updated with future events.

Alexia Koudigkeli — A Reflective, Uplifting and Spiritual Approach to Contemporary Painting**; December 5, 2021**

Alexia Koudigkeli was born in 1996 in Athens. She graduated from the Hellenic-American Educational Foundation of Athens College in 2014 and then completed her studies in London at the University of the Arts London (UAL) in 2018. In 2021, she held her first solo exhibition at Agathi-Kartalos Art Gallery. In the last 3 years she has showcased her work in Athens College as well as in various group exhibitions both in Greece and abroad. Her works are in private collections in Europe and America. The artist lives and works in Athens, constantly creating new pieces for upcoming projects and exhibitions.

HT: Which emotions and thoughts come to surface when you paint?

Koudigkeli: My paintings serve a similar purpose to my dreams, as they both have a symbolic meaning attached to them. I paint how I feel. The overall theme of my

artworks is expressionist figures. Sometimes I place them in urban scenes and some others, I paint them individually. In my work I portray situations and settings with the intention of freezing time and representing my own complexion and deep emotional chaos beneath each composition.

HT: As a painter, you certainly experienced changes in your work. Would you define any particular phases?

Koudigkeli: Photography is often a starting point to my painting process, but only black and white pictures can influence my work. I find colored photographs too distracting, as I like the color palette of each piece to be intuitive and to reflect upon the moment depicted. Light is a key element in my work. The natural light, or the light that comes from within. I use acrylic paint overall, but when it comes to adding the light in the synthesis of each work, I always use golden, silver or copper spray paint in order to enrich the artwork. The golden strokes have become a characteristic element of my work, adding not only texture but also character to my paintings. The creative process not only deals, but also welcomes the changes that come with being an artist and having a fluid mind.

HT: How would you describe your communication with the viewers, the audience?

Koudigkeli: My paintings aim to express, but also to awaken sentiments. The depiction of the figures, with a strong expressionist idiom, radiates a vibration that I hope can reach and move the viewers. A reflective, uplifting and spiritual approach to contemporary painting.

HT: Tell us about your exhibitions, especially the latest ones.

Koudigkeli: My first solo exhibition was presented in October 2021 at Agathi - Kartalos in Athens, Greece. The exhibition presented a body of work of 55 paintings (acrylic on canvas), with the main theme of urban figures. The depiction of the figures, with a strong expressionist idiom, attempts a modern social commentary, sometimes expressing the loneliness of people and sometimes their companionship. The fluidity of the artist's emotions is evident throughout the canvas, from the texture of the figures and the urban space, to the characteristic golden touches in the composition of the work. Currently, I am working on new pieces for upcoming projects and exhibitions.

Kuma & Mahala — Synergy Between Researchers, Academics, Visual Artists and Community**; December 6, 2021**

In the following interview, Claudia Zini (Founder of Kuma) and Selver Učanbarlić (Creative Director of Mahala) share information on formation of Kuma, future plans, and how past developments led to the creation of Mahala.

HT: Kuma International is an organization which empowers how the arts can encourage constructive dialogue on human rights and justice, civil society engagement and democratic participation. As a founder, could you tell the readers how Kuma story began?

Claudia: Kuma International was born in 2018 in Sarajevo, while I was still writing my PhD thesis about contemporary art from BiH with a focus on the impact of war and genocide on the local contemporary art scene. I envisioned Kuma as a research center dedicated to visual arts and architecture in the aftermath of war and violence, war memories, trauma and identity from post-conflict societies, focusing mainly on Bosnia and Herzegovina and former Yugoslavia. The original approach of Kuma is the intersection between academic research and a concrete platform for exhibition projects and community engagement which creates a unique synergy between researchers, academics, curators and visual artists on one side and the local community on the other. It took me three years to come up with such an idea, since I officially moved to Sarajevo in 2015 while researching for my thesis. There were different reasons to establish such a research and educational center: I wanted other people like me, researchers, students, art historians, curators, and such, to learn about contemporary art from the country. I wanted to share with them my knowledge about the subject, and give them the opportunity to travel to Bosnia and most of all to meet in person the protagonists of the local art scene, which I always consider this to be an enormous privilege, to meet people first-hand, as this is not something that usually happens inside the university, to learn about the history of art from the artists themselves. This for me was a life-changing opportunity. So, I wished more and more people could have the same experience and learn how the war in the country in the early nineties radically transformed the aesthetics, contents and techniques used by local artists, giving birth to new artistic vocabularies. Since its beginning, Kuma International engaged in different educational activities, working closely with scholars and artists. The primary focus of Kuma's first educational step is the post-war artistic production from Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was analyzed in detail during the first Kuma International Summer School that took place in Sarajevo in June 2018. With the patronage of the Italian Embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we organized a one-week intensive course focusing on post-war artistic production from Bosnia and on how artists from the region have been affected by the political turmoil of the 1990s and how they processed the fall of Yugoslavia, the 1992–1995 war and its consequences through their artistic practices. Students also had the unique chance to meet local artists, explore the city's museums and art galleries and visit artists' studios. It was incredibly successful, exceeding all my expectations. A program like that, focusing on artists reflecting on the traumas of war through their art, their autobiographical artworks telling personal stories, rather fragments of memories, which are often lost or purposely excluded from the official narrative, did not exist before.

HT: One of the projects which grew from the Kuma community is Mahala Magazine. You published the first issue a couple of months ago. Are you planning to maintain the life of Mahala Magazine?

Claudia: We published the first issue in February 2021 after a two-week workshop with Italian photojournalist Enrico Dagnino, while the second one came about in July, Le Monde journalist Remy Ourdan and Bosnian photographer Velma Babic worked with us as guest editor and guest photo editor. We are now about to complete the 3rd issue which will come out in January 2022. It will depend on funds, but sure, the plan is to continue with Mahala Magazine and hopefully have 3 other issues published in 2022. The enthusiasm with which the magazine was welcome is amazing and motives us to go further. There are so many interesting stories out there to collect.

HT: Visual of the magazine looks different from most of the magazines in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As a creative director, what was the idea behind the style of Mahala?

Selver: Firstly, I always like to say that Mahala is not a magazine. That's why it doesn't look like any other magazine we see. If I needed to describe Mahala, I would

describe it as something organic, something that changes but still has a descriptive line to it. As the creative director I tend to nicely pack the idea of Mahala and send it to the world, in a visual language that everybody understands and finds interesting.

HT: As a creative brain power behind this story - are you currently maintaining any other projects?

Selver: I really love to put as much creativity as possible into every project I work on, even though sometimes it can't be linked with the creative field. In terms of my academic past, I've finished my degree in the field of architecture which gave me a lot of new creative and management skills that are really helpful today. Besides architecture, I enjoy photography at most but I don't consider myself as a photographer at all, because I still have to learn a lot, but Enrico, our chief editor, is a big support and a person you can look upon. Recently we created a postcard of Sarajevo, as a part of our donation campaign, where we want to send to all of our supporters and lovers of Sarajevo a little emotion of the city.

HT: *Rememory 1992-2022* project is a series of 6 workshops on Art and Remembrance and a documentary film about the city of Gorazde. Could you tell us more about the emerging ideas behind it?

Claudia: Sure, we are very excited about this project that we are running together with our partner Brodac Gallery in Sarajevo and that is supported by the International Relief Fund for Organizations in Culture and Education 2021 of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe-Institut and other partners. Commemorating 30th anniversary since the beginning of the Bosnian War (1992-2022) the project focuses on Sarajevo and Goražde and involves artists, photographers and photojournalists in order to offer a highly local context-sensitive perspective on the consequences of the past and the importance of remembrance, and a reflection on the role of the arts and culture in social transformation. The workshops were run from September to November 2021 by six local and international artists and photographers (Smirna Kulenović, Ziyah Gafić, Enrico Dagnino, Mak Hubjer, Aida Šehović and Velibor Božović) on the theme of memory, remembrance and contemporary forms of memorialization. Together with selected participants, our guest lectures worked towards posing and answering a number of questions about the nature and varieties of memory, such as: how do we remember the past and what is the role of art and photography in that process? As for the documentary film, it will be presented next spring in Gorazde and Sarajevo. Titled *UNSAFE AREA Goražde* it is an on-going documentary project on the Bosnian enclave of Goražde, the only city in Eastern Bosnia that was not conquered by the Bosnian Serb Army during the 1992-95 war, telling the stories of those who survived the war and defended their city from the aggression. We will also organize a photo exhibition around the same time, in spring 2022, showing a number of personal stories by war survivors from Goražde, together with unique archival material.

Selver: I'm currently dedicated to the *UNSAFE AREA Goražde* documentary, which will be not your typical documentary but more of a statement to all of the citizens who gave up their normal life routine and had the strength to endure all of the bad things that happened there. Also, it will show how all of those people started living again, from zero, which I think will be a great inspiration to mine and younger generations.

HT: You have a lot of projects on your plate! How do you keep your schedule running so tight?

Claudia: Enthusiasm, love and gratitude for what you do are the key!

Selver: As Claudia said, love and gratitude and empathy before all of other 'business' characteristics.

Lex Pan (Alexandra Panagiotidou) — Emotions Are Headlights That Lead Us to Understanding Ourselves; **December 6, 2021**

HT: How did your visual arts journey start?

Panagiotidou: I have been drawing as long as I can remember myself, I have always used drawing and painting as a form of self-therapy even when I was younger I remember that I was always producing very emotional work, feelings, ideas that I couldn't really express in any other way, it had always been my getaway, however I never really thought I would be doing this for a living; my dream was to become an actress, that is why my studies were solely based in Theatre. My professional art journey began in the beginning of the pandemic; it was a very interesting time for me as suddenly there were a lot of big changes in my life and I felt the need to express myself and all of the emotions I was going through at the time. I really couldn't stop painting, new ideas would come to me constantly and the whole process for me was so healing - I think that is how I got through this tough time for me. I realized how important art is for me and my wellbeing and decided to give it a go, I quit my job, moved to my home country and decided to drop everything and focus primarily on my art, it's worked successfully so far.

HT: What messages are you communicating through your art?

Panagiotidou: I am really just trying to communicate and promote expression of emotions, I feel most of the characters depicted in my art are creatures that are struggling to come to terms with their own emotions and how they are feeling. Usually, the characters depicted are feeling something I have felt in the past and wanted to express it in some way, this helps me understand this emotion; It is one thing feeling something and something completely different seeing it in front of you, letting that emotion become a substance. It all becomes clearer, why it appeared in the first place and it helps with my own healing and understanding of difficult emotions. I really don't have any other way of dealing with difficult situations and emotions and also grow from them. I think that is something people put on the side and forget when it comes to personal growth, you really just have to have a magnifying glass on top of all your emotions to really understand them and what they mean to you. So, I guess my main message is to express your emotions, to feel them, to live them, not to suppress them, because that's what they are there for; they are small headlights that lead us to understanding ourselves better and the people around us.

HT: In which direction do you see your style developing?

Panagiotidou: I am working really hard to developing my Illustrations as well as my oil paintings, I believe I can exert more intensity in my work if I develop my technical skills. I have a lot of ideas regarding my illustrations, I want to turn them into animations, I often get visualizations of my creatures running around and doing different things and I think that would be amazing to do. I am a huge fan of Pollynor, Oh De Laval and Miranda Makaroff and I am very much inspired by their illustrations, I feel like I could create a whole world with my designs and that's something I would really want to do. For my oil paintings, I have a lot of ideas of where my style could develop to, and I have a feeling that it will move towards a more sensitive but realistic depiction of my creatures, I am very much influenced by Bottero, and I really enjoy the intensity of inflated shapes and shifts in sizes & scales, so this is what I am working towards.

HT: As a self-taught artist, did you have any particular hardships in your career development? Do you have an advice for other self-taught artists?

Panagiotidou: I think being a self-taught artist is a blessing and a curse, I think sometimes going to art school can limit your creativity because you are encouraged to create something in a specific way, if you have your own specific style already it is a bit hard to create along someone else's "rules". However, I think one needs to work really hard, to learn, to read, to create so they can feel confident to compete with people who have dedicated a certain amount of time on their studies. I think talent is important and really good to have but I don't think any talent can get you very far if it is not nurtured, worked on, developed. So, my advice would be to read, to learn to be influenced by other artists and to learn from your mistakes. It is such a cliché, but the truth is good things really do take a lot of time, so be patient with yourselves, we are always constantly learning and developing into the best versions of ourselves.

Đenita Kuštrić —Social Activism in Artistic Practices is Often the 21st Century L'Art Pour L'Art**; December 20, 2021**

HT: Having a rich portfolio in visual arts must've meant a long journey. When was the starting point?

Kuštrić: I was born on the hottest day of the year 1986, with burning 43 degrees in Mostar, and I've been trying to feel alive ever since, against all odds.

HT: Did everything go as planned in the beginning?

Kuštrić: I never really planned any of this. Initially, I just followed my daily need for doing specific things, so naturally some accomplishments came along. Retrospectively, I always see some intentive logic in my actions. To give you an example - as a child, I used to make copies of paintings, I still have one of a Paul Klee's painting. I had no rational reason to do that, I didn't know who these painters were back then, I just copied their works from some random book – I believe you are simply drawn to it. I've actually remembered this only recently. And in present, I teach Copistics at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo as a part of learning about the history of painting. Of course, I didn't invent this method, but isn't it strange?

HT: Would you mark any art collaborations which made an influence in your career choices?

Kuštrić: Sure. It was highly formative for me to had met artist and my professor Mirsad Begović before I was consciously sure of my career choice. He has been enlightening me all the way, at least his lectures and his work ethics have always felt very assuring to me. He has succeeded to prove me that there IS a light that never goes out. That has always kept me going, something very spiritual about it. I still believe that in our post-knowledge era, where you can find any fact online in a second, the most important thing is to electrify students. I appreciate my education very much; I am probably the last generation who had the older artists and theorists from Bosnia and Herzegovina as my professors - people who had dedicated their lives to art. They had no mercy for excuses but they were full of spirit and creative support. Painting technologist late Metka Kraigher-Hozo and her late husband artist Dževad Hozo were somehow interested in me from day one, so this relationship also guided me. I did research and wrote a book called *Synthetic Technologicality in Contemporary Art* (published in a second edition by the Academy just this December) and the book is kind of a sequel of Metka's book *Painting Methods and Materials* from 2006. She believed in the importance of this research very much and wrote only one review in her life – for this book.

HT: Are your creations aiming for social activism, or does your preference go more towards l'art pour l'art?

Kuštrić: I should clarify that besides my writings and projects about technology, I make my own works of art. I believe it's coming to one, eventually. My work is not about social activism directly, but giving the fact that my book changed the Academy's curriculum and that I formed two new subjects about contemporary art in three departments based on this book, I think this is what social activism really is in practice. Anyway, I think that social activism in so-called “artistic practices” often is the 21st century l'art pour l'art. I mean, it has become an artistic subject like any other and it a priori doesn't mean it goes further than aiming certain shows and some narrow circle of art-related people, hardly having any of the true activist components. Ai Weiwei said something beautiful about the oppressive government in China in his dialogue with Anish Kapoor the other day for Al Jazeera's Studio B: „When the ceiling is too low, you cannot stand up. If you really want to act, you have to crawl. If you want to jump, if you want to fly, that might sacrifice your life.“ Personally, I highly respect that. But if you keep showing the ways people crawl in your practices, or any hypothetical outcomes, it's also l'art pour l'art of our time. I just think there are many categories of social activism in art and activism in 2021 and it's very important to think critically about it. I think there is a bunch of pitiful hypocrisy there. Everybody seems super-concerned and call their expression art, there's so much false saving the world for self-promotion with very poor artistic credo! So, personally, I may be a whistler from time to time, but I always hope my work is subtle, open and profound and that it will have long-term followers rather than it should function as a wake-up alarm.

HT: Currently you're holding a position as an Assistant Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo. Did the position of a teacher change your personal perception on gaining knowledge?

Kuštrić: It actually didn't. But the thing is that young people have less and less patience for their personal background development, for investing in certain silent strength of knowledge, skills etc. that eventually structure the work. They are very driven on hype, on instant results, on the wow-effect, and that is extremely bad for an artist. This is new because we didn't have Instagram when I studied, hardly Facebook. I hope that our Academy curriculum will organize professional subjects about this in the future - basically about coping with media culture. The fear of missing out is very dangerous, very imposing! I see it gets in the way of being on the ground and hard work.

HT: Academic work is often focused on research and papers. Is there a subject you most gladly work on?

Kuštrić: My work is mostly based on a trans-historical method; I enjoy putting things together, scroll through timelines and find some strange connections between points. I think that is the beauty of life - some kind of magical integrity of realities. See, we have so many “on this day” personal memories just on our social media profiles that in 20 years of activity you might understand that we live in, what I call, a flashback culture. My joke about it is that it is history finding its way to repeat itself, but it actually isn't naive.

Lejla Alimanović - Jazz as Safe Space Filled with Challenges**; December 21, 2025**

HT: Would you tell us a bit about your work and latest performance with Sinan Alimanovic Quartet?

Alimanović: I’m a writer who also loves music. I find my creative freedom in the intertwining of music and literature. The fact of having two artistic media at disposal, while creating, I accept with a sense of responsibility, since this approach requires additional articulation. Because I write on music, it is very important for me to approach

it, so to say, from the inside. I can only do that if I create music, if I'm constantly trying to understand and feel how successions and forms of sound are realized. Basically, I search for these common meeting points between music and literature, and in this sense, it is useful to recollect the fact that the Greek word "mousike" doesn't mean music, but it applies to the word Muse and each of the muses refers to a different art.

In the context of music and work with my dad, Sinan Alimanović, this collaboration has been going on for a long time. Together with Sinan Alimanović International Band I performed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the region and in the People's Republic of China. Together we published several discography releases and our latest album was recorded in 2018 in New York City. The album Sinan Alimanović International Band – *Lejla*, was released in September, 2020 by New York jazz label Miles High Records, owned by multi-instrumentalist and educator at the Juilliard School, Mark Sherman. Sinan Alimanović (piano, bandleader) and I (vocals) recorded the album *Lejla* in Trading 8s Recording Studio owned by two-time Grammy award winner Chris Sulit, together with the New York based jazz cats Harvie S (double bass), Victor Lewis (drums), Jed Levy (tenor saxophone) and Adam Klemm (soprano saxophone) who is based in Ljubljana. Mix and master were finished in New York by David Kowalski, also a Grammy award winner, and Harvie S, an artist who is listed in the family tree of jazz music.

The most recent performance of the Sinan Alimanović Quartet was at the 23rd Novi Sad Jazz Festival, held at the Serbian National Theatre. I spent a wonderful time in Novi Sad and the Festival was organized on a very high level. This time I had a privilege to perform with an ensemble composed of regional music giants: next to my father, Sinan Alimanović (piano, bandleader), the drummer was legendary Ratko Divjak, a widely known as a jazz drummer but also as the member of the Yugoslav band Time and the double bass player was fantastic Saša Borovec, a longtime bassist of the Croatian Radio and Television Jazz Orchestra. Together with the band I performed two original tunes and one Sinan's composition (*Sarajevo Remake*) for which I wrote the lyrics. My tune "In Search for Freedom" can also be heard on the album *Lejla*. It is especially important for me that I performed, together with the great rhythm section, my composition "Roy Hard Groove" which I dedicated to the beautiful Roy Hargrove who unfortunately passed away too early, leaving behind a lot of inspiring music. Actually, I had performed the song "Roy Hard Groove" for the first time in 2019 with Sinan Alimanović International Band in Beijing. Then this unfortunate pandemic arrived, and I only had the chance to perform it again two years later at the Novi Sad Jazz Festival. I'm very grateful to my dad who showed a big trust in me, by throwing me into the fire. Namely, I joined the ensemble, not only as a vocalist but also playing the Fender Rhodes Piano. This is the first time for me to play the Fender Rhodes Piano while singing on stage. At home I have a beautiful Wurlitzer Electronic Piano on which I rehearse and create, but still, it was a totally new experience for me to play a Fender Rhodes Piano with a band in front of the audience.

HT: Recently you got your PhD at Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo. What was your thesis focused on?

Alimanović: Yes, in October, at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, at the department of Comparative Literature, doctoral studies Literature and Culture, I successfully defended my PhD thesis focused on comparative arts. My doctoral dissertation *The possibility of the new wholeness through the comparative aesthetics: reading music, listening to literature* is based on a comparative analysis of the relations between literature and music, with the aim of proving the possibility of the new wholeness. It focuses primarily on the research of bidirectional and multiple relations between the 20th and 21st century novel and one of the contemporary art music

streams, widely known under the collective name “jazz”. Relations between literature and music are analyzed with the primary goal of discovering encounters that lead to the recognition of joint confluences and interweaving between these arts. Applying comparative methods allows us to read music and to listen to literature. It is therefore useful to keep in mind that all arts are “inscribed on the body”. In the era of the emancipated sign, of shifted conventions, of fragmentation and consequently eclecticism, the need to understand and to articulate the possibility of the new wholeness emerges. This need arises by means of the changed image of the world shifted paradigms and their exhaustion. During the 60s, Susan Sontag characterized a new state in the world, but also in the world of art and science as “the New Sensibility”. The Rhizome metaphor, by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, can serve as a vivid example of the multiple currents, channels, unpredictable connections and their “lines of flight”, which are formed due to the movement of the contemporary world. Consequently, the new wholeness describes the multiple relations of literature and music within an era as explored in my dissertation. Each fragment, as well as the sign, carries its own autonomy and represents a whole for itself, and simultaneously carries a trace of the absent, hidden in the Other. The concept of infinite semiosis indicated an inexhaustible dialogue between works of art (signs) and thus the new wholeness. All mentioned above, allows the weaving of the rich textures, webs whose threads are diverse, but intertwined into the new wholeness, through the dialogues they lead. The relationships between arts do not function only in formal encounters (e.g. libretto and aria in opera), but on several different levels including: on the philosophical level; in terms of form; and in the context of the aspirations of the epoch. I thus concluded that that the new wholeness has already emerged and the questions of its possibility refer to the questions of its articulation. The new wholeness is separated from, so to say, the “old” wholeness, by the conjunction “but”.

During the research process, I had a unique opportunity to learn from great artists and authors. On my journey I met brilliant people who helped me a lot. Some of them are Tvrtko Kulenović, Hanifa Kapidžić-Osmanagić, my mentor Edin Pobrić, Muhamed Dželilović, Nina Alihodžić, George Cotkin… In the context of music, I had the huge support of my father, but also from Harvie S who is, by the way, an educator at the Manhattan School of Music, Victor Lewis who played with some of my favorite artists, for example Carla Bley and Kenny Barron, and with whom I had a beautiful chance to collaborate and speak. In the meantime, I had a great opportunity to talk to the great Nicholas Payton, creator of the Black American Music movement, but also to meet the legendary Herbie Hancock… I weaved all these experiences into my thesis, hopefully with success. The next chapter is a book.

HT: Talking about education, how did your journey in music start? Why jazz?

Alimanović: My whole life I’ve been surrounded by music and jazz, since my father is a musician and my mom is also a music teacher. As a teenager, while I was discovering what I want (by deciding what I didn’t want first), the music of Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Chet Baker, Antonio Carlos Jobim, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Oscar Peterson, Miles Davis, etc., turned out to be, so to say, the safe space or the place where I felt at home. When I say “safe space”, I don’t think about it as a comfort zone. On the contrary, I immediately discovered a number of challenges, and some of them are actual even today. But I also felt, and that feeling is still with me, that this music offers me a great inspiration, the desire to understand the idiom and to master it. I will continue to learn.

HT: There is one peculiar point on your Instagram account, stating “Reading Music - Listening to Literature”. What does that mean?

Alimanović: Reading Music, Listening to Literature is an excerpt from the title of my PhD thesis. I already explained it in the previous answer. For a better explanation, I will make one parallel, which, at first glance, seems distant: in Marcel Proust's novels I can hear what I can read in the compositions of the contemporary artist Nicholas Payton. In the work of both authors I recognize texturality that occurs through subtle transpositions. The art paths are vital. The base is movement and rhythm. The art is "inscribed on the body", as I already mentioned earlier. One of the tools that allows reading music and listening to literature is synesthesia. This is also one of the examples of the new wholeness. The new wholeness is not conquerable, yet it gives itself by mutual recognitions and connections.

Kemil Bekteši - Criticizing the Attitude of Tradition Towards the Naked Body**; December 27, 2021**

HT: Could you tell us something about your education background, and beginning of visual arts career?

Bekteši: I decided quite early on what I would be doing my whole life. I think that's very rare, so in that sense I'm very lucky. When I was in elementary school, I didn't have stages where I wanted to be this or that, I always knew it was going to be art. So, I think it's more like art chose me, and not that I chose art. I finished an Art High School, and after that I received my bachelor's and master's degree at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo. Also, I am very happy that my parents supported me, because I know many young and talented people whose parents did not allow them to be educated in art. For that reason, I wrote that my father loved me so much that he allowed me to be an artist. I think that is the greatest proof of love for me.

HT: As a student in Portugal, at the Academy of Porto, you focused on "Balkan Erotic". How did you develop the idea?

Bekteši: Portugal was very refreshing, for my art especially. I started experimenting in my art practice there and I really liked the relationship I had with my professor. He helped me a lot I started listening to sevdah and the lyrics inspired me for my works. In one text, a woman offers her body for gold coins because her lover has no money. That intrigued me. I wanted to criticize the tradition of Bosnia and Herzegovina with my work, especially the fact that it is misogynistic at the root of it. I criticized the attitude of tradition towards the naked body and the constant need to cover and censor it. I wanted to talk about taboo topics and initiate a dialogue that will lead to a solution. I think a very important aspect of that series is the fact that a man talks about feminism. We're kind of used to only women being feminists, but that doesn't have to and shouldn't be the case. What was interesting to me was that I had to leave Bosnia and Herzegovina to see the problems in society. I feel like that sometimes that's the best way; you need distance and then you realize what needs to change when you get back.

HT: You participated in many solo and group exhibitions. Would you highlight your favorite ones?

Bekteši: I did and I am very grateful for each one of them. It is always difficult to highlight out just one exhibition as my favorite, but I think that my first solo exhibition, which I named after my surname "Bekteši", is very special. With that exhibition, I wanted to introduce myself both metaphorically and literally. The show is very intimate and private, because I talked about the history of my family, about myself, about how I came to where I am now and why I have a strange name and surname. After that exhibition, I

experienced a kind of relief, because now I think that all the people who visited that exhibition really know me. That was the point and I think we succeeded. My curator Adna Muslija did a great job at that exhibition. One work of that series was presented in my hometown of Belgrade. That was very important to me. The work was presented at the Youth Biennale. That exhibition is very dear to my heart, everything was wonderful and I met many colleagues who are now my friends.

HT: Any collaboration in your past work that made an impact on your future choices?

Bekteši: I think that every collaboration leaves a certain impact on you, you find out what you like and what you don't when you work with someone. I am very happy to have people I can trust and who are always ready to collaborate with me. I work with Adna Muslija often, I call her my mind reader. Also, collaboration with Đenita Kuštrić, who was my mentor when I studied. I am very grateful and happy to have had the opportunity to work with her. I think it's rare to have a mentor like her. When I first told her about Etnos and Eros, she immediately knew what I wanted to do. She taught me a lot, even when she wasn't aware that she was teaching me. I told her once and I will say it again - she is my art mom.

I also like to talk to Bojan Stojčić and Alma Gačanin, they always listen and give the best advice.

HT: Any advice for multimedia artists just beginning their art journey?

Bekteši: Hard work is your best friend!

Elma Čavčić - Stick to the Things You Love and Results Will Come**; December 29, 2021**

The topics that you can most often find in the works of Elma Čavčić are war, political power and her false brilliance. Her work shows various elements related to these topics such as weapons, soldiers, planes and flags. These topics fascinated Elma both as a child and as she grew up, which led her to present and explore through artistic work while studying at the Academy of Fine Arts (HKU) in the Netherlands. The starting point of the work was the stories of her parents, which she tried to present through artwork in paintings and ceramic sculptures, as stated in Elma's biography.

HT: As for the first one, could you tell us something about your background?

Čavčić: I was born in Žepa, Bosnia and Herzegovina. During my childhood I've heard several stories about the war, but I never really paid attention until I was 13. During my puberty, I got really interested in it and decided to do more research online. Since the topic is a sensitive one to talk about, I never asked direct questions to my parents. I gathered all from the past and my own experiences when in Bosnia. During my study at the University of Art in Utrecht (HKU) I tried to convert the stories in abstract figurative paintings. At my graduation show in 2017 I showed 4 paintings in which I tell my mother's story. My parents didn't know I used their story until then. Currently, I am still working as an artist and art teacher at a middle school and the academy.

HT: You're currently in Netherlands? How well does your art voice get recognized and accepted?

Čavčić: The art scene in the Netherlands is super small. So, a lot of people know each other. So far, my work has exhibited quite often here in the Netherlands. People are interested in story due the combined history in Srebrenica. This year, I also heard I will receive a big support from Mondrian Fund, an art fund in the Netherlands. So, the Balkan narrative is well presented here.

HT: Ceramic sculptures is one of the ways you communicate your message. Is there a certain process, a unique method, behind developing the sculpture?

Čavčić: The ceramic works are based on a summer school I did at The Fifth Season, a psychiatric institution. We had several lectures from people from the psychiatric field. One thing that sticked to me was the sentence 'We are coaches for life'. I immediately had a vision of a soccer coach who times everything you do in life. This was a start for the medallions and award series. It was a critical note to the social performance that is present to this day. Nowadays my ceramics are an extended piece of my paintings. A lot of shapes and colors reflect the artworks.

HT: Any favorite latest collaborations holding place?

Čavčić: Currently I am working with Jovana Stulic on an exhibition about the diaspora who live in the Netherlands. We met 3 years ago at This Art Fair in Amsterdam. We met up last year and discussed about a possibility of making an exhibition together. Our first goal was making an exhibition with our own works, now we have a full first duo solo. We worked for a year together on the upcoming exhibition in H47 in Leeuwarden called *Ljubavni Sudar*. The exhibition is sadly postponed due the new lockdown announcement. We hope we can open up after the 14th of January.

HT: What is your vision when it comes to developing your art career?

Čavčić: My personal life motto is actually 'fake it till you make it' (laugh) But besides that, it just to push further and have patience with your progress. Sometimes you need a few more years for people to get to know your artwork and to understand where it comes from. If you have found a topic you like, stick to it even though you may not get noticed in the beginning. In the end, it will somehow work out. My topic is often received as heavy and people are sometimes awkward about the fact they don't know about the things that happened on the Balkans in the 90's. Still, it doesn't stop me to make art about it.

Matei Osenk - Neoplatonic Beliefs and Existential Contemplations Are Legitimate and Justified**; January 2, 2022**

Matei Osenk-Saller (b. 1995) is a visual artist and an illustrator currently residing in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. He graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, earning his BA degree in 2018 and currently studies MA degree at the Department for Printmaking.

HT: As a starting point of our chat, please share some information on your educational process, and your choices within them.

Osenk: Education on the Academy of Fine Arts was important as it was the first time I was introduced to the printmaking techniques. My affinity towards the pen and ink drawings, etchings and woodcuts were always present, I just was not sure how to actually create in that manner before starting my studies. Wanting to be an illustrator, my initial idea was to study graphic design, but I applied for printmaking because I thought there is more traditional drawing involved. The great thing that came out of my education is finding myself drawing daily, the act became very natural to me. I developed discipline and patience I never had before.

My interest in aesthetic theory and methods of interpreting art occurred in the final year of pre-graduate studies and that was the main aspect of my work for a long time. After graduating, I enrolled for my MA degree at the Department of Graphic Design which helped me think from the outside perspective. There was one specific subject dealing with design as a cultural and sociological phenomenon, which was of great importance for my later contemplations on art.

Last year I enrolled at the Department of Printmaking to finalize my research regarding the print series I have been working on for the past two years.

HT: By the end of 2021, you had an exhibition, and performed as a speaker. Could you tell us more about this experience, and your next plans?

Osenk: Last month, I had my first solo exhibition and the audience had the opportunity for the first time to face much of my work. This is a cycle I am currently working on, entitled *Body for the Revelation Day*, and one of its phases, created in 2021, was presented at the exhibition. My original intention was to share my knowledge, and for me, every exhibition has the purpose of encouraging conversation and contemplation, more than just presenting an aesthetic object.

Regarding the lecture I gave, it is a short lecture in PechaKucha format, where my intention was to present the ideas of the belief system that sustains my work, rather than talk about the content of my work. The ideas I tried to present are about language and ritual, a kind of allegorical or sympathetic action, the genesis of any creative discipline. I do not like to limit my work in the technical domain, to emphasize my identity on what I do, in the form of vocation; and for that reason, I spoke about abstract ideas, with the intention that a person who thinks about them can more easily connect them with their work and experience.

Humans communicate through well-developed system of sounds which we call “words”.

HT: As a part of your work, you develop visual systems to explain the oddness of word systems which we as humans use. How did you come to this idea?

Osenk: Personal research and analysis of this phenomenon is based on various topics and I have tendency to complicate things more than necessary. I will try to give the concise answer and cover what I think is the most important, therefore, describing my experience chronologically would be the best way to somehow explain this idea.

My interest in mythology, religion and history dates from an early childhood. The fascination was not coming from the historical fact, even though, for some time I thought it did. It came from an affinity towards the images of mythical thinking - I felt some primordial part of me awaken while contemplating a mythological story or a Greek deity as a six-year-old. It was a starting point which led me to more complex questions regarding my later faith and things hidden in-between the lines. For what I know could be described with the term occult, was the main logic of my childish perception of the world. I had a weird imagination and weird logic, which I came to eagerly embrace in the past few years. I was interested in thaumaturgy, magic in general, mysticism and wisdom which follows it. I was always making up preparation rituals inside my mind and invoking some kind of imaginary entities all while trying to justify it with some common sense. It

was a relief when I found out many people actually do this in their own specific ways and it is a sign of strong imagination which relates to the intellect. While growing up, being immersed into the different kind of conventions, I suppressed these thoughts and dismissed my transcendental “abilities” as something absurd. The interest still persisted, hidden in the shape of music and poetry, which I was actively into for a few years, now more or less. What I was seeking in the music and poetry was more of a technical form that could relate to me, the perfect mirror, the song of my soul - I have always liked that phrase. Since I was not much of a musician and disliked the practice aspect of it, I tried to complete my experience with visuals to accompany the song. That was my first step into the field of visual arts, which later I decided to dedicate most of my time to. As I was mostly interested in illustration, as in editorial illustration, making pictures describing something and making a living from it - I tried to perfect my technical and thinking skills towards the field of applied arts. The reason I studied at the department for printmaking and not at the department for graphic design (which is more related to the applied arts, obviously) was because back then I thought printmaking had more drawing in traditional sense involved and I wanted to draw good for the sake of it. The reason why I am mentioning this is regarding the initial question, because I made a full circle of rethinking my purpose as a visual artist and then found it in something kind of unrelated. All of my experience made a perfect sense when I discovered C.G. Jung’s writings on psychology and alchemy, J. Baudrillard’s theory on simulacra and simulation and E. Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms – all of my somehow neo platonic beliefs, childish imagery and existential contemplations were now legitimate and justified. So, the idea of using words as images and images as words - giving phenomena names and naming the shapes has purpose of controlling or changing these phenomena in the sphere of our inner experience. The great example can be found in archaic societies such as native tribes, where major deity, the idol which protects the tribe, has a secret name – name is kept a secret to not be used by an enemy tribe, as they could perform a ritual to grant loss of power of the guardian deity, losing that protection would mean certain defeat in a war of the tribes. This may sound absurd, but there is certain kind of aura in words and images, especially images representing people and identities. It can be best described through the principles of sympathetic magic and the logic behind some superstitious beliefs. I just happen to use visual arts to learn and understand more about those ideas, create s certain distance between dimensions of my thought and evaluate my experience, my body of knowledge and memory of it, maybe manipulate it in some way.

HT: When artist creates its art, there are multiple levels to the inner processes, versus the final outcome. How do these processes come to you, and do they change your nature while transforming?

Osenk: I do consider that every person has some kind of artistic output, but that is according to my definition of what art is and will try not to get all philosophical about it right now, as it is not really related to the question. This inner process you mention is very natural to every human, regardless of their vocation and work they do – things we do and interact with will shape us in some way, my choice was to be shaped by this specific manner of making images and will use it as an example to explain some ideas. Similar to the principles of ritual and magic I have talked about in the previous question, the wholeness of our psyche is always projected onto our environment, we cannot disconnect from it no matter how mindful we become. While transforming some hypothetical object through artistic process, let’s consider it a projection of some part our psyche. We do not only intervene with surrounding nature, but with our psychological state. I like allegories and the idea of making images as a means of controlling psychological processes, or at least understanding them better. Image-maker is as omnipotent as he is experienced in the realm of images. This concept of projections is

very characteristic for rituals – they are designed sequences of actions with intention of simulating the transformative experience. Rituals are mimetic, the genesis of artistic disciplines may actually be in archaic rituals and early practice of magic. This assumption indicates early artistic tendency to invoke or change the laws of nature. I find this process of thought very relatable to my work, as I am trying something similar in a more sophisticated and complex sense of today's worldview.

HT: How do you choose what the symbol in your work suggests, if the human unconscious choosing and variable of symbolism is the focus of your work?

Osenk: The choice is made through free associations, precisely - intuition. There is no specific method to follow in defining meaning of my narrative, I don't even believe it has to be defined by me to have meaning for someone else and that is why I avoid explaining my images. Being aware of my own tendencies is what gives the actual meaning to an artwork at the time, but these change over time. Every creative process consists of very different intentions, some are known to me, some are not - in the end, everything I create has implications of my experience and the way I want to interpret it is probably the right way at that given moment.

Jovan Vidaković - Beauty of Photographing Theatre Is That Each Performance Is Unique**;**

January 6, 2022

HT: How did love for theatre photography start?

Vidaković: When I first came to photograph a play, I had absolutely no idea what to expect. I'd never done anything like that before, and I was terrified of "stage fright," but in front of a stage. Then, as the show began, everything fell into place: lighting, actors, play, stage... I knew I was hooked right after the show. And that feeling sustained me for more than a decade. As I learned more about theatre, the more I loved to photograph it…

HT: You also have a pretty developed portfolio at street and documentary photography. What is your preference in choosing the perfect shot?

Vidaković: My "first love" was street photography. Street and the theater, I discovered, had a lot in common. I imagine the street as a large stage on which you must pay attention to "actors," anticipate their behaviors, and wait for the right moment.

HT: Do you agree that a better-quality camera creates a better photographer?

Vidaković: No, absolutely not! The camera is just a tool, and that tool is only there to help you realize your vision. No high-end camera can help you until you know how to use it and have a clear vision of what you want to do with it.

HT: Tell us about your latest project in theatre.

Vidaković: The beauty of photographing theater is that each performance is unique. You must adjust to the ambiance, tempo, message, and other aspects of each play. As a result, each new theatre endeavor is unique. My major goal while photographing a theatre play is to try to capture the soul of the performance. Emotions, facial expressions, movement across the stage... all small details that contribute to the theater's charm. You've succeeded if you can persuade someone to watch a show after viewing only one photo from it.

Ružica Milutinović - Development Comes from Changes & Experimenting; January 12,

2022

HT: When did you find your first inspirations for choosing visual arts career?

Milutinović: I have been always addicted to drawing, from early childhood I have found passion in it. Later, during teenage days I wanted to keep challenging myself in it, exploring portrait drawings and as a consequence of dedicated work - being better at it.

Somehow, I was always interested in faces, characters, people. My first inspiration were young girls and boys, and later I kept up with portraits – just changing type of people I draw/paint. As I got mature so did my portraits get more mature characters. During my college days, I studied Economy, but also found drawing as very important hobby and somehow an escape from everyday life, catching quick portraits of people in restaurants, portraits of students listening lecture and similar. Later as a Master of Economy I kept progressing in sales and (digital) marketing business for about 15 years, without dropping pen and paper from my hands for some sketches in free time, until 2018 when painting became my main profession. Even in the field of economy, I always worked closely with people, studied them, negotiated and dealt with them, felt their emotions, their characters, which have inspired me in the art as well.

Somehow my life experiences, my passions and interests, all started manifesting in my artwork and change over time. Through portraits of other people, I actually did numerous portraits of myself as a warrior and chief of my life going through turbulent periods in my thirties, emotional changes, breakups, changing lifestyles, living periodically in other country, and how I felt being in that space, my personal response. Reevaluating and revoking memories is what inspires me today as well. There exist some kind of an emotional charge that comes from the different faces of people, reflecting their strong character which I am trying to convey on canvas, hoping you (the viewer) can feel it too, can feel that character strength and absorb it.

HT: How do you prepare for conveying the message in your work? Where does your creative process begin?

Milutinović: I usually screenshot interesting visuals, photos of people I find on web. I find them by accidental scrolling or in search with purpose for some cultures for example… I sometimes watch people sitting in cafés, restaurants and I photograph them. Then I save it in my folder named “To paint one day”. That is one large folder with around 200 ideas per year. I usually use just 10% of them and I lose interest for the rest of 90%... but I never delete them. Sometimes I get inspired by movie characters, movie scenes. I often paint strong characters of MMA fighters, fighters from the game world. I am pretty much inspired by people’s fighting spirit, with fighters in emotional or even physical sense - maybe because I trained martial arts and maybe because I reflect physical struggle or the wisdom of fighting in a subconscious way on everyday life. It is just a moment when my eye catches someone on web or real life when I recognize character in pose/look/intention that inspires me.

HT: How did you develop your style and focuses in painting?

Milutinović: Development sometimes comes from changes, experimenting with other materials, even changing themes, or doing something I wouldn’t have courage to do before. The key is just painting, painting, painting – and as Picasso said: “Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.” I believe that progress will find you through work as well. Nowadays, I share art studio with 2 great artists, and we motivate and push each other towards work and progress, which certainly helps a lot.

HT: Did you have a turning point in your artistic development, where you decided to take a different perspective on things?

Milutinović: My turning point was the end of 2017, when I resigned from a high Marketing position in an international corporation. Until that day, painting was my hobby,

so after leaving 9-5 (mostly 9-9) stressful job, I started with professional painting and freelance half-time marketing just in order to put painting as primary job by time and importance. After this big lifestyle change, quality of my art work started rapidly increasing. It is different when you paint 8 hours per day, instead of previously 8 hours per year when you find time. I started endlessly exploring ideas of portrait paint on canvas. Somehow my life experiences, my passions and interests, all started manifesting in my artwork and change over time. Through portraits of other people, I actually did numerous portraits of myself as a warrior and chief of my life going through turbulent emotional changes, breakups, changing lifestyles, living periodically in other country, and how I felt being in that space, my personal response. Reevaluating and revoking memories is what inspires me today as well. People recognized that fighting – motivating spirit on my portraits and started following me on Instagram.

HT: Would you tell us something about your latest project?

Milutinović: My latest project was changing lifestyle mentioned above (from corporate to art life), and I recently moved to art studio to share space with other artists where we can learn from each other. Although I paint portraits by commissions, between those orders is not always easy to find time for a new project. But, with good organization, I thrive to develop in my two projects I'm currently working on, and hopefully present it to a wider public. First, I am exploring different cultures lately, by periodically putting focus on some country, tribe, and strong characters of older people, still keeping with strong-character portraits. I plan to develop it and present at exhibition during 2022. Meanwhile, you can find all my work (commissioned and these non-commissioned paintings at Instagram page @mruzicaart). Second is not kind of specific project, I would rather name it as an experiment: I am also exploring myself and my art work in different types of art at Instagram page @abstract_ruki I have no idea where this will take me, but I will consider it progress if I find myself in one of the topics from this newest profile.

Djeca Tvoja — Discussing Moral and Ethical Standards of a Political State, Seeming Frozen in Time**; January 17, 2022**

Founders of KulturKraft, Saša Krmpotić and Arnes Hamzić, decided to share their stories and insights in production of KulturKraft, and the creative process behind *Djeca Tvoja*.

Djeca Tvoja (eng. Your Children) is a crime series produced by KulturKraft, a diverse company engaged in producing audio-visual arts. The story of *Djeca Tvoja* starts when Vitos life tumbles down into an unfortunate encounter with a local organized crime group, whose leader Zera promises him concrete ways of dealing with his current problems, at the cost of his submission to the criminal world. The cast are Dino Bajrović as Zigi, Kemal Rizvanović as Zera, Kerim Cutuna as Dela, Muhamed Dupovac as Vito, Ana Tikvic as Noni, Edis Bilic as Guma, Senad Milanovic as Krpa, Lidija Kordic as Krpica, Adnan Goro as Agent, Sead Pandur as

Doctor... Set decoration by Amila Terzic, and costume design by Monika Mocevic. Directed by Arnes Hamzić, written by Arnes Hamzić, Saša Krmpotić and co-writer Maja Jurić.

Series premiers on February 2nd, 2022.

HT: KulturKraft is a company engaged in producing audio-visual arts. As the founders, could you tell us when and how did KulturKraft start its journey?

Arnes: Saša and I have collaborated on many film sets in different roles. As time went on and we kept crossing each other's path, we decided to create an organization as a platform for cooperation with everyone in the film industry and art in general. This gave birth to KulturKraft. After the production of two music videos (MC Smook – Another day in paradise, LLG – Zu Dir) and several other audio-visual projects with other artists and platforms (Humanity in Action, Bold Action, Eyelenda, etc.), we started giving focus to our initial project idea of the *Your Children* TV series.

Saša: Initially we started to develop *Your Children* from a single thought that says: “Our generation doesn’t have an identity”, which later on developed into a complete universe, through which we discussed moral and ethical standards of a political state, which seems frozen in time. As time passed on, the form of the project took on many shapes, which we had to deal with, in order to make the project a modern, dynamic and relevant story. To this day, we succeeded in forming a stable and socially engaging project that communicates with our society.

HT: Arnes, *Your Kids* is a series where a core story is a young man’s journey into adulthood, who has succumbed to the criminal world in Sarajevo. As a writer and director, what were your focuses and choices when presenting such a story?

Arnes: In the pilot episode we focused on showing how an innocent life, Vito’s life in particular, will inevitably, at one point, meet with unfortunate circumstances, as is the nature of things in his society. We wanted to show how someone can unwillingly be forced to start doing things that are against their morals and principles. But this is only a fragment of the universe we have prepared, which in the future is of a much larger scope. I believe that very long uncut scenes add to the realism of our story and allow the audience to see how things unfold naturally in one fluid motion. Communication with the cast and crew was essential in order for everyone to be invested on the same level in the story we were all creating. Every artistic choice we made was made only when it was for the greater good of the universe and its expanding story.

HT: Pilot episode of *Your Kids* has just been finalized, and you’re fully invested in the next steps. Do you have an aim for the future, when it comes to investors and collaborations?

Saša: The pilot was filmed with an independent budget. Arnes and I decided that the timing for shooting the pilot episode was perfect at the given moment and so we acted accordingly. We’re now in search of funding with various possible investors and collaborators, with whom we will make the shooting of the series possible.

Arnes: To continue working on a professional level and deliver this to the audience in the quality they deserve, we would now require a budget significantly larger than what we can finance independently. The complexity and the size of the production would be massive, which would create a lot of jobs and professional experience for many artists in our region.

HT: Saša, you've graduated Acting on Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo. *Your Children* is your first project in the role of a producer. Did it meet your expectations? Did you come across any challenges?

Saša: I took on the role of a producer, as soon as we started KulturKraft's journey. Driven by the experiences I had earlier in my professional career, such as working in protocol of the Sarajevo Film Festival, I worked on minor projects under KulturKraft's name, such as music videos. I was very excited when the time came to engage in pre-production, production, and followed by post-production phase, as all that was rich in experience. Obstacles were there, of course, but we managed, with the rest of the production team, to overcome them all, thankfully.

HT: What are your plans in general, when it comes to the development of KulturKraft?

Saša: One of the ideas of KulturKraft's foundations is to develop a strong network with artists locally, regionally and globally. Create a communication between young artists, who will express themselves in various art forms and with all kinds of different material. We believe the reform of culture begins in the youth.

Arnes: We wish to bring raw and realistic art that can keep up with the complexity of today's world. We strive for international understanding, better communication and developing a culture that is in line with what we consider modern or futuristic and progressive at the same time. But while doing this we are to remain neutral and professional, to keep the view through our lens universal and relevant to all humans.

Hanan Hadžajlić — Music Gives Me Something Stronger Than the Power Itself, and That Is Freedom**; January 18, 2022**

Hanan Hadžajlić is an internationally awarded composer, flutist and transdisciplinary researcher, currently residing in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2018, she has been employed as a Teaching Assistant and since 2021, as a Senior Teaching Assistant at the Department of Composition of the Music Academy (University of Sarajevo).

She is a founder and director of the INSAM Institute for Contemporary Artistic Music (2015) and manager of scientific journal INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology; member of the ensemble SONEMUS (2012) and since this year, its executive director. Hadzajlic holds doctoral degree in flute performance (live electroacoustic music performance) and master's degree in composition. Currently she is a student of doctoral studies in composition and doctoral studies in transdisciplinary studies of contemporary art and media. Her music was performed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Hungary, Denmark, Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, Israel, USA (New York, Connecticut, Maryland) and Australia. In addition to activities in the field of artistic music, she is also engaged

in the composition of popular music, as part of the collaboration with the Bosnian and Herzegovinian rapper Cunami, under the pseudonym Nanah Tzil.

HT: For now, if you could tell us about your educational background. How come you've chosen music as a way to communicate thoughts and feelings?

Hadžajlić: I began with music education when I was four years old, attending preparatory classes for elementary music school in Slovenia. Then, I went through the standard system of music education; from elementary and high music school to academia. So, I completed bachelor's and master's degree in flute performance at the Music Academy of the University of Sarajevo and later completed doctoral studies in the same field, but specialized in performing live electroacoustic music (with modular systems), at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade of the University of Arts. Also, at the Music Academy of the University of Sarajevo, I completed bachelor's and master's degree in composition, and continued doctoral studies, so I am currently still a student. In addition to that, I am a doctoral student in the field of art theory and media at the Faculty of Media and Communication in Belgrade of the University Singidunum. Since I have been in the music education system all my life and I have gone through many different creative experiences, both in the field of artistic and popular music, I am in a way trained to express my ideas about the world primarily through my ways of shaping different music syntaxes. I do not always and not necessarily communicate the thoughts and feelings that I truly want to convey in some more abstract forms; sometimes I just deal with dramaturgy, which aims to achieve a certain effect in the end. Sometimes it is all about the money and fun. Dear artists who still believe in myths, it is time to accept that. However, sometimes, but also most often, music is for me the only free space that does not allow me to grow up according to current standards and limits of civilization, so it gives me something stronger than the power itself, and that is freedom.

HT: At the moment you are actively working with INSAM Institute, collaborating quite often. What's a crucial point in your bond?

Hadžajlić: The crucial point is that I enjoy the achievements of the INSAM Institute, especially of the fantastic, internationally accepted scientific journal INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology. I founded INSAM in 2015 with the aim of establishing an international network that would deal with the latest practices in the field of artistic music and will constantly follow but also create new scientific paradigms and/or trends. I am very happy and grateful that my job at INSAM is now exclusively managerial; sometimes I suggest ‘where we could go’, what to pay attention to, and I actually enjoy it the most when I watch my colleagues, especially the journal's editorial team, run a business at a highly professional level. The editor-in-chief of the journal, Bojana Radovanović from Belgrade, has in some way gained a status in INSAM that probably no one will ever be able to overshadow. Maybe this is exactly what should be the true ideal today; to be irreplaceable in your work.

HT: As a part of your academic practice, you've been writing and publishing papers quite often. Any favorite topics, or even a certain niche which you like to handle your own way?

Hadžajlić: Yes, I have written about various things, from the analysis of baroque sonatas, through heavy metal and globalization, artificial musical intelligence, to aspects of performance in everyday life. At the moment, my favorite is to deal with performativity in accordance with human nature (where I mostly refer to N. Machiavelli), models of behavior (cognition and performance theory according to R. Schechner) and the human need for drama and hype (popular culture). The world is much more interesting when we

do not take people's final decisions or current situations too seriously. Disappointments are an outdated paradigm in this century.

HT: As a music producer, you're working with Cunami, who's a well-known rapper. This can be a huge difference from academic forms. How do you transform from classical forms to rap music?

Hadžajlić: Cunami is fantastic. The most talented person for music I've ever met. He has a sense of detail that most people are unable to perceive, which I have not seen with many world-renowned musicians with whom I have collaborated. It is not just about talent but also about a special form of courage and bravery in thinking. Composition is always composition; skill and ability to find and carry out a certain intention. Contemporary artistic music definitely transcends the historical concept of form, which is on the other side, still a condition for popular music. However, the combination of work in the field of artistic and popular music for me means balance and direct insight into the various contents of today's world. So, on the one hand, I seek freedom in security (form), and on the other hand, security (form) in freedom.

HT: If there's anything you would change when it comes to music production in Bosnia and Herzegovina, what would it be?

Hadžajlić: Music is just one instance in the production of music and culture in general. Yes, I would change some things. For example, human beliefs in current knowledge, experience, and ideas about the ‘struggle for justice’, whose overall, average intellectual status reminds me of high school fascinations with young revolutionaries who most often end badly in their thirties. I may seem rude and narcissistic but I don’t like it when something is unconvincing. People prefer to criticize capable and brave people rather than to work 16 hours a day and try to keep things under control at least in part. I don’t like social parasites that feed by gathering information from the practices of creative and courageous people - and they do it mostly out of context. The greatest enemies of people and humanity in general are those who are so convinced that they are on the right path that they do not leave room for self-analysis and new knowledge. It’s like having an intelligent and capable but not sufficiently educated and experienced art student; when he realizes how dangerous art is because of its usability, he often stays at the level of recounting the first lessons of history to his friends, and does not even think that perhaps he is the best medium of modern ‘Goebbels’ machinery. I was like that too. At some point, I realized that I was an audience of already outdated discourses. They sold me this pen. We live in a century in which things are often not what they seem. One should know how to wear wolf’s fur and act like a beast and not just cry from the perspective of a sacrificial lamb. However, most people change their minds because of money. But they often prefer their free time so they go back to old practices, their comfort zone.

For example, some people do not understand that I consume very primitive music in my private life, at least from the perspective of the topics it deals with. The same people like to watch Netflix series and movies that have even more extreme content. That's fine with me. See, probably no gynecologist approaches the problem professionally in his private life. Also, I believe that one nutritionist will sometimes eat something from McDonald’s and not only eat broccoli. On the other hand, the best inspectors are those who are capable of thinking like criminals. Quite simply, I am sick of the slowness in thinking and understanding the possibilities of the modern world, but also our tasks. Artists who supposedly devalue popular culture: either they admire it pathologically and thus just feed their frustrations, or they are very bad at their job. All historically significant artists have consulted with popular culture. Don't forget that historical music today is mostly music for tourists. As long as we separate working in fields of culture and art, we do not understand what it is all about and especially our

function. Consequently, as long as we criticize one and obey to the other, it means that we are still not in the capacity to accept new knowledge and practices in our lives and thus not to implement appropriate self-criticism for our development. Without self-criticism there is no reprogramming of the old identity and shaping of new identities (and I believe that the richer a person is, the more identities one has), and without the above mentioned, we cannot keep up with a world that is constantly changing. When we realize that these identities are nothing more than just our roles that we practice and apply every day in various interactions and actions, we will find our essence. Without knowing its essence, man is a dead social being because he is not authentic. Authenticity is the most expensive and extremely rare. Everything flows, everything changes, everything passes, but authenticity always has a messianic character. Even if I change my mind about some things, I'm sure it will never make me happy to meet market standards. Because met standards are not satisfied appetites, and humans are very hungry animals. Life is cruel but it can be a lot of fun if we stop feeling sorry for ourselves and at the same time ask for special rights. Even in the animal world, the strongest, the most intrusive and those who know how to take what they want, they survive. Thus, after all, great societies are created. Why is it wrong to say that the center of the world is where I stand? If you say no, measure, prove it. I think we lack that attitude in general and I want to change that.

Olivera Popović — Exploring the Attitudes of a Modern-Day Woman**; January 19, 2022**

Olivera Popović is a singer from Serbia, who recently published her song *Drama Queen*. While talking with Olivera, she opened up about her beginnings, work in music industry, and accepting oneself in our full glory and love.

HT: As a starting point, could you tell us something about your beginnings in music. Was it a calling from a young age?

Popović: I have always been interested in music in one way or another. I have been drawn to listening to music and performing since young age. Before my solo career, I have sung in a choir, and at the age of 14 I started performing as a singer-song writer on an acoustic guitar my father taught me how to play. Later on, I have become a frontwoman of a band called Pop Ups for five years. When I started studying, I took a break, and again started performing as a singer-songwriter at various festivals in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia five years later, in 2015… After a couple of years of doing that, I formed a duo with a wonderful guitar player Milica Uzelac and we delved into dreampop and shoegaze. Still, I felt I could do more, so during the pandemic I started making music on my own again using various instruments and computer programs resulting in the pop r'n'b music I have released recently.

HT: How did you choose r'n'b as your main genre?

Popović: I can't say I actually chose it. It's just that when I started making music, I noticed it had r'n'b and soul elements in it, and I simply embraced that as it inspired me. I personally listen to a lot of genre fusions and r'n'b is a part of it. But I am mostly into pop and whatever feels good and is fun.

HT: As a musician, what are the obstacles in developing your full potential?

Popović: Finances, that is, the lack of them. From my experience, you need an excellent producer who can polish the sound you make and you need money to invest in

music videos and marketing. I have somehow managed (with a little help from my friends) to achieve some of my goals in 2021, but as an artist you definitely need a label who believes in you and is willing to invest in your ideas so you could focus on the creative work. I am still looking for the right one for me.

HT: Did you have a turning point in your artistic development, where you decided to take a different perspective on things?

Popović: Yes, I actually have. It happened last year when I decided to start doing things on my own again, including organizing everything (the filming of the music videos, the music recording, the marketing…) and, of course, releasing a new sound I had been working on. I have also started exploring different topics in my lyrics (such as feminism, self-love, friendship… and not just love stories).

HT: What is your latest work focused on?

Popović: It's mainly focused on exploring the attitudes of a modern-day woman in charge of her own life. Psychotherapy has helped me a lot in discovering and accepting different parts of myself and I finally feel free to integrate those parts into my songs.

HT: Any advice for those who are starting out their career in performing arts?

Popović: Experiment a lot, embrace the changes within yourself, make sure you yourself like what you create, listen to criticism, invest in your work (time, money…) and be nice to people.

Rikardo Druškić — We Must Look for Answers Within Ourselves, Never Outside**; January 24, 2022**

Rikardo Druškić is a self-taught visual artist from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who decided to create his own path, different from the dominant elements of the postmodern era. As stated on his website, through his art, Rikardo searches for the meaning of life and the truth that drives him along this path. He creates intuitively, often without any preconceived plan. Basic drives of his creative process are love, fear, spirituality, and empathy. His work is always the result of his introspection, which takes place on both conscious and subconscious levels.

HT: As for the first question, could you tell us a bit about your choice to express yourself through visual arts. How did it all start?

Druškić: Everything started with my birth, even before that actually, the moment my parents met. Genetics formed me as much as the experiences I had, which make me a man I am today. In connection with that, my beginnings were actually in my senior high. Then, as a boy afraid of the world, art gave me sanctuary from the reality in which I wasn't accepted. Because of that, in the beginning it was hard for me to understand what I was doing. As time passed, my perception and understanding of reality started to change. Now I'm a man who knows enough about himself, his purpose, internal and external, and that's how I behave. Art is a medium which I use to communicate, first with myself and then with my environment. This gives me the opportunity to enter other, non-material realms. There I find my truth, feed my soul and have my visions which I clearly materialize through my creation. They let me feel the wholeness with my inner being.

HT: *Awakening Consciousness* is a series of paintings which were exhibited in 2020 in History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Do they represent a breaking point in your career? How did these paintings affect your growth?

Druškić: *Awakening Consciousness* is a series of paintings which were produced in 2018. Their first exhibition was in the City Hall in Sarajevo, and after that in The Center for Fine Arts BOZAR in Belgium. These are two of my most important exhibitions. City Hall is a symbol of the city where I grew up, and BOZAR hosted exhibitions of Picasso and Matisse. This created a big responsibility. The paintings are autobiographical because they were in the synchronicity with my own "rebirth" which happened when I was 27 years old. Impulses which were always too intense for me were ruling my being, and I was harming many people around me. I was my own biggest enemy. As Friedrich Nietzsche said: "The tree that would grow to Heaven must send its roots to hell.", and that's exactly what happened to me when I hit my mental rock bottom in 2017 when I started to "awaken". Everything happened very quickly, and I remember that period very well, because my life got a drastic turn. Eastern religions helped me the most in my rebirth. Through them I, among other things, learned the magic of nature. After that, I get acquainted with the thought of Karl Gustav Jung, who became one of the foundations of my thoughts and view of the world. I managed to turn my demons into my angels. The intensity of my thoughts and emotions, which used to be my biggest enemies, now became my biggest standfast. Buddhist doctrine helped me to get acquainted with the concept of "awakening", and thus this series of paintings arose. *Awakening of Consciousness* was a diary of my change, my awakening that I painted in eleven paintings, and which I thought other people should know about as well. I think that every modern man should get acquainted with Eastern culture. It offers a different view of the world than the one we are calibrated to here in the West. For a part of the audience, these paintings still represent my best works. I was always bothered by the material-focused perceptions of a Western man. Terms like reputation, power, fame, for me were concepts I never gave importance to. My value system has always been intangible. Buddhism clearly pointed to contemporary problems and was very practical in solving them. Although my thinking went further in my desire to know the truth, many of the ideas that I first came to know, I implement today in everyday life. Over time, this cycle of paintings has become a mini platform for doing higher good. Pragmatically, I wondered how can I help people in my country? In more than a year, through three projects in which I first exhibited my work, together with three other authors, we collected more than 11k BAM, which later went to the non-profit humanitarian organization Pomozi.ba. It is important to mention that the *Awakening Consciousness* project is supported by the European Union in BiH, but also by its High Representative Johann Satller and the Swedish Ambassador Stromquist Johanna. It was during that period that the exhibition at the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina that you mentioned at the beginning of the question took place. It was a physical manifestation of the online project *Awakening Consciousness*.

HT: A lot of your works are presented in Berlin, Vienna, New York... Does growing up in a differently energized surrounding such as Sarajevo make a difference when presenting your work to western cultures?

Druškić: When I ask myself which are the traits that I value the most, then I see that I was most influenced by my father and my mother, meaning genetics. The myth that man is born as a "blank slate" and later shaped by society has long been established by modern science as inaccurate. Man, just like all other animals, works with programmed code. One of those codes is our instinct for survival. In Sarajevo, I always felt like an outsider. I do not blame the city for that. Sarajevo is a big part of my material

identity and I love my city a lot. Also, large part of my audience lives in Sarajevo. Art speaks in universal language, but even that has not helped me to reduce that feeling of rejection. I am a highly individualized person. Group dynamics never suited me, and I always opposed it. Over time, first with the help of psychology, and later through other sciences, I learned to articulate my emotions through thoughts. Now I know that the price of being a member of a group is the impossibility of personal opinion. I felt all of this empirically, on my own skin. Each of my attempts to be part of a collective or group resulted in me feeling my inner voice being suffocated, which I never allowed. I am a lone wolf and I walk my own path, building my own system of values and interests. That path was crucial in the process of individuation. One of my hardest fights and biggest victories was to feel the love for this, for myself just the way I am. That is why the great minds of our past helped me the most, whose thoughts guided me but also showed me that my view of the world is not wrong. I call myself a seeker of truth. Truth is my deep, fundamental mover, which, along with God and art, is the foundation of my everyday life. A person who is part of a group cannot be a seeker of truth. The truth, whatever it may be, good or evil, is always at the extreme, at the end of the cliff, and there the person is alone. People are afraid of the end of the cliff, because when you are there, you can see the abyss. And in the abyss are all the repressed demonic beings of our subconscious and darkness. Only when a person is isolated, then the thoughts can become pure, and the light can show the way. In this regard, I do not think that Sarajevo had a great influence on my art or its presentation. My understanding of art is the opposite of what contemporary postmodernist thought says. I believe in the love, truth, magic and dimension of the invisible. It drives me and gives me purpose. When I create - I create what my inner beings find. I have no autonomy over that. I don't find my works, they find me, so my art is mythopoetic. This is why my approach is completely different from the vast majority of my colleagues who call themselves postmodernists. Postmodernism rejects metaphysics, abstract, and relativizes the importance of the beautiful. It strongly opposes the medieval transcendental ideals under which I live: the truth, the good, the beautiful. One of the postmodernist axioms is that every art must be politically and socially engaged in order to have value, and the ones which don’t are only decorative. I oppose that! First, at its maximum potential, this statement on political and social engagement can only be a part of the truth. Second, as someone who already has experience, I have a sense of duty to tell my younger colleagues that the most important thing is to listen to your inner voice. He will best tell us anything that interests us. Every man, every artist, should look for answers within himself, never outside. Art has always been in charge, in addition to religion, of the spiritual development of man. The truth is that there is a lot of poor-quality content today. We can “blame” democracy and liberal capitalism for this, which have made art much more accessible than before, when only a handful of the chosen could deal with it. Just because it has a lot of bad content doesn't mean that there aren't artists who talk to God and whose art is magic. It is this magic through art, among other things, that gives color, warmth and meaning to human lives and souls. One of the things this pandemic has shown is that during the greatest crises, man turns to the spiritual, the beautiful, the divine. He turns to art. It is a metaphysical potential that will be in us forever. That potential is repressed, and just as it is with all repressed content, it always finds a way to surface. What was once filled by God is now filled by political ideologies. They have, to my great regret, found their way into art, but also into other academic communities and even sports. In my quest for knowledge, I do a lot of research and reading. Over time, it has helped me to learn to give respect to people who are completely different from me. We cannot all think the same. Not everyone is set up to search for magic and other dimensions, just as not everyone is set up to be a social justice warrior. Until we learn this, the gap created by polarization will

become larger, and the social context more and more complicated to solve, with the evolutionary threat that comes with artificial intelligence. We must, as a human being, prepare.

HT: *Mundus Novus 1.01: Robot Who's Afraid of The Butterfly* is your latest work, focused on AI. You presented artificial intelligence as a potentially good way for humans to cooperate. Am I correct; would you elaborate?

Druškić: The Buddha talks about the middle way and Aristotle mentions the golden mean. They both talk about the same thing - proper life is life between two extremes. The man gets carried away and loses touch with reality. Science is my counter-tendency to the irrational. Art gives me wings and science prevents me from getting too close to the Sun. I like to research psychology the most. Psychology is my first love. If I weren't into art, my first choice would be the science they once called the "science of the soul". Psychology has helped me get to know myself better and will have my attention forever. After that, lately, I've been researching three topics the most; neuroscience, quantum physics and artificial intelligence. Neuroscience deals with the nervous system, its structure and development. Neuroscientists focus on the brain and its impact on behavior and cognitive functions. What I especially like about this science is its practicality in everyday life. It corresponds to my goal of constant progress. New research results are constantly coming out, the implementation of which improves human life at various levels. Quantum physics is very complicated. In essence, it says, among other things, that the nature of reality at the level of the smallest particles is not what we are used to within the 3 dimensions in which we live. The quantum coupling suggests that two atoms, although distant materially, can be connected, by changing one atom, the other one changes. Artificial intelligence is a topic that everyone should think about. From time immemorial, man has strived to create a mechanical being that resembles God. Machine learning relies on memorizing patterns to simulate human actions or thoughts. The more data there is, the better and more successfully machine can predict. The process of automation has largely begun, and it is predicted that in twenty years, almost 80 percent of the work now done by man – machines will start doing. The question is what will happen to all those people who lost their jobs. There are a number of people who are optimistic about this problem. They think the world will be a better place then. There will be many more artists. It is a utopia that will not manifest in the real world. Man is a complex being. Work gives him a structure through which he has stability. It is not the only purpose of work - material gain. What happens to man, when his existence is based on chaos - chaos ensues. We are already inferior beings in many ways and it is very possible that the algorithm will treat us as a danger at some point. What will be his reaction? From the very beginning, fantasy has been an integral part of the development of artificial intelligence. *Mundus Novus* is my work that contributes to this topic. I didn't do it with forethought, but the flow and arrival of the idea seemed natural to me. The work, through the interactions of the characters, presents the different outcomes of the problem we face. Homo Sapiens is only one micro-moment in relation to the history of the planet Earth. As a part of the painting, I set up a situation in which a man hands a torch to a robot, in peace, wondering: is it natural in evolution for a new and better species to come? The Robot offers a different view of machine tools; they have the same emotions as us - love, fear, empathy. What happens to the first robot who gains consciousness, emotions, the first time he sees a creature like a butterfly? We as humans are used to the butterfly as innocent and gentle, because we are programmed like that, but will the algorithm be the same? This relationship between two characters, a butterfly and a robot talk about this topic in a somewhat absurd way. In addition to the great threat, the benefits of artificial intelligence are enormous and they are already ubiquitous. There are already significant implementations in finance, national

security, health, criminal justice, transport. These developments create significant economic and social benefits. It is important to say that after this work I got an idea for a project, which will actually be a whole cycle of paintings that will deal with this problem.

HT: You are joining residency in Greece, as a part of Siilk Gallery program. What are your plans there?

Druškić: My life is routine to the point that I know in advance what I will do for a few weeks. After painting, I like to spend time alone in nature. Nature is one of my greatest truths. I feel great respect and admiration for her. With Buddhism, I learned the magic of nature, with which I began to change myself. I discovered another type of life dynamic. I discovered people who live by other laws of energy. These were the laws that suited me better than the city laws that brought unrest to my certainly restless being. Nature also helped me by giving me the courage to get closer to God, which ultimately started my awakening. Now I enjoy the peace which going in nature provides me. When I'm not in nature, then I like to enjoy art the most. I like listening to music, watching movies, series and animations the most. This kind of routine life gives me security in relation to which I can be the most fruitful. The plan provides a structure through which life gains stability, but it has its drawbacks. The Taoist symbol yin-yang symbolically speaks of two dualistic territories, which are seemingly opposite, but are actually connected and interdependent. The two territories are known and unknown, order and disorder. Proper life is living with one foot in order and with the other one in a mess. Order gives peace, security, stability, but in disorder, in unknown territory, man has the opportunity to progress the most. Too much order leads to tyranny, and too much disorder leads to instability and decay of structures. For me, my departure to Greece is a way out of the routine comfort zone in which I live in Sarajevo. Apart from being the birthplace of democracy, Athens is the cradle of Western civilization. Athens was the heart of ancient philosophy. Each of my travels has enriched me and made me a better person. In addition to wanting to get to know the culture, traditions and people, I plan to work diligently in Athens so that the Greek audience can see the best version of my works. After a month of painting, I will have the opportunity to exhibit my work at the Siilk Gallery. The exhibition will last a month.

HT: Do you have an advice for artists at the beginning of their career? Is there a trick how to approach art, or even ourselves, while forming?

Druškić: As I said, a man is born programmed. Much of this code is deterministic and cannot be changed. Every person is born with his own limits within which he can act. One of the basic tasks of every young person should be to learn to listen to their body, to read his code, as well as to reprogram himself from imposed social norms that do not allow a man to think for himself. It would be natural for young people to have the help of more experienced ones in this process; they are the bearers of wisdom. Unfortunately, a young man can only rely on himself. This is best seen in our education system. It is not normal for the system that emerged in the early 20th century to be the same today. Whether this was the initial intention - I do not know, but it proved to be an excellent tool for unconsciously enslaving people. Instead of learning how to think for themselves, young people are taught how to become servants of the system, how to obey the commands of those from above. That is a big reason behind collective apathy. I further think that young people choose their vocation too early. No 18-year-old is independent enough to choose their life vocation, as they are already confused young people often influenced by parents who, although they want the best, have a vision for their child, which does not have to correspond to what that child really is. It’s also one of the reasons why young people are unhappy, because they do jobs they don’t like. The process of self-realization. Jung calls it individuation. Such a person is a psychologically mature person. Today we witness that there are very few such people. For the most

part, people are torn between their desires, fears, and opportunities. So, I say, it is crucial to learn to listen to your body. I think every young person should ask themselves what they want out of life. After asking this question and getting an answer that may not come right away, two questions need to be asked: are the wishes in line with its capabilities and how much effort are they willing to put into making it come true? People mostly see the surface. They don't care more deeply. In my case they see material achievements; new paintings, murals, international exhibitions. What they don't see are my sacrifices. My work day starts at half past five in the morning. Often, especially at the beginning of the week, it can end around five PM. I almost don't have a social life. But these are conscious decisions, because I've understood the answers to the questions of what I want and how much I am ready to give. I want to create mondial works, and I am ready to give everything. I'm not even close to my goal yet - I see huge opportunities for progress, and I'm on the right track. I want to reach my full potential. Potential is a term that speaks of the future. With potential, man first discovered that he can control time. By postponing current profits, taking sacrifices in the present, we have the opportunity to change our future. This is called delayed gratification. My whole life has been focused on artistic progress. From so much focus on art, when I'm not painting, art started coming to my dreams. It is one of the most beautiful gifts God has sent me. In my dreams I paint, I often talk to the characters, sometimes I get ideas for new works. I respect all people. Everyone's pain is something that has my attention, especially if it is from my immediate environment. What I will say may not be popular, but my heart and intention are pure, so I think I have the right to comment. A lot of artists who complain about how hard it is for them, how much the state does nothing for them, are actually big non-workers. I never liked the role of a victim! When they don't create, and they almost never create, they waste their time not getting deeper into themselves. Where does this egocentric idea that they deserve more come from? It comes from the fear of failure and from the idea that it is always better to blame others for your personal failures. This is not how heroes are created, and heroes change the world. The truth is that we live in a very small, poor country, where having the title of an artist is not a privilege. I say this now only as a witness from the city in which I live, a large number of young people who have exceptional talent have begun their careers in art, painting, acting, comics, film. All these people are separated from their colleagues by one thing: work ethic. We are very undisciplined people. In general, the frequency here is very low for people. This can be seen in the topics that young people talk about. Most often, these are gossips about diminishing success and projecting personal demons onto others. Also, there is very little quality art content in Sarajevo. While it's sad, it's good news for all artists who want to make something big out of their lives. In Sarajevo, unlike other cities in the region, where there is much more content, it is much easier to shine. Why does someone who has no work ethic, no work habits, think that going to Berlin, Paris or London will make some success? Well, there, every third person is considered an artist. A lot of people talk bad about social networks. This is because they always focus on the bad in everything. For me, social networks are an ingenious invention. You need to know how to use them. On Instagram, I got the opportunity to meet fascinating painters, which I would not have had the opportunity to meet otherwise. You know what they all have in common? The amount of work and effort they put into their creative work on a daily basis. I would go back to the previous question. My advice to all young people is to divide life and its phenomena into two parts: those they can influence and those they can't. In this regard, no young artist can change the system or the country in which they live. That is simply impossible. The state is changing systematically, and it takes generations to change the consciousness of the electorate to make the situation better. What can change, clearly

and concretely, is one's worldview. So really big changes start from the inside out, not the other way around.

HT: We are witnessing demotivation in our environment, in our immediate reality. Is there a way out of passivity?

Druškić: This is the most difficult question so far. It is difficult to talk about motivation, about getting out of passivity when the problems that many people face in our country are existential. I want to take this answer in another direction. John Varvaeke, a psychology professor at Caden University, came to my mind. He says that in modern society we have a 'meaning crisis'. Religion has always been a pillar of man. Nietzsche declared the death of the god in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but also warned of the consequences. Modern man has conspiracy ideologies or theories instead of higher purposes, but they cannot replace God. A man who has no higher purpose turns to nihilism, and there are all the elements of the modern age: a lack of ethics, morals, courage and honor. All of these are topics that make a lot more sense in the context of Western countries. We in Bosnia have much bigger problems. Ethno-national enthusiasm makes a dominant part of atmosphere in our society. We are one turbo folk country, as is the most of the Eastern Europe. Similarly, there is a percent of people which doesn't support this. But to give the Devil its due, ten voices of radicals are always heard more than thousand voices of normal people. Basic instincts suit people here the best. We are witnessing the horrors of the war that was behind us. One cannot help but wonder what kind of man can take a knife in his hand and take someone's life. I am aware of the demonic capacity of every human being, but I guess there should be a boundary between humans and animals. Such a level of awareness is best suited to politicians who are at the top of such parties. They do not aim for a better and more progressive Bosnia and Herzegovina! Why would they, if that meant they would lose their position of power. From a psychological point of view, power is more valuable than money. Because of power, one can very easily lose touch with reality, and that is how our politicians often look. Fear is a tool used to manage people. Other people are always demonized and create a context of the story within which it is necessary to protect their vital national interest. People are hungry, thirsty and barefoot, driven by hatred, and party leaders, who dine on the account of citizens' taxes. Nationalism which is actually a continuation of tribalism is the lowest level of consciousness. We here often behaved like prehistoric tribes. I've heard it somewhere, and I agree with that one hundred percent; politicians are a reflection of the people who live in it. Democracy has its major flaws, but in principle it is very simple: power of majority governs. What does that say about Bosnia? It says the average person in Bosnia is not educated enough. He hates another because of their religion.

HT: Do you, as an artist who creates pieces focusing on more general picture of the world, have a piece of advice for leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Druškić: I am lucky to live in Sarajevo. Cosmopolitan values are more or less retained here, but in contact with people from other cities I hear horrible things. The war continued in people's minds and it is only a question of when it will manifest again. I cannot give a concrete answer, which will have credibility and value. It takes a generational change of consciousness, so that in fifty or hundred years, for example, we have a healthy Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is not impossible. We have the example of the Nordic countries, which were the poorest in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. These are now the most progressive societies, the ones with which each other is compared. They made their change through education. Instead of theory, they taught their children through practice how to live. In our country, the largest number of young people who have the potential go to other countries in search of a better future. Who can

blame them? Many of my closest friends have left or are planning to leave the country. These are people whose potential is huge. Sometimes I imagine myself, in thirty years, I will remain the only one of my immediate environments to live here. My thoughts are with my compatriots, but how can they essentially help in this seemingly hopeless situation? That is why I launched the *Awakening Consciousness* platform - with one goal - to help the most vulnerable. In the end, I would say that this interview is my picture of the world. I do not impose my thoughts as the ultimate reality; I am aware of the fact that we are not all adults in the same environment. If we look at the world only as material, to me things were made easier in relation to the environment. I have never had existential problems. Yet I cannot look at the world through other people's eyes. I always talk about everything from experience. I know that most artists are not happy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I sympathize. Nevertheless, it is not my reality and it would be unfair of me to take on someone else's narrative. My everyday life makes sense now, but it wasn't always like that, on the contrary. My life for the most part was very dark, and I was very self-destructive. I think it is important to know that life can be fulfilling and beautiful, even in gray Bosnia and Herzegovina. Everyone has their own, personal path, but I think there are collective behavioral facts: the ones which are definitely good for the person and the ones which definitely are not.

Benjamin Ribić - Violin Is Much More Than Romance and Melody**; January 27, 2022**

HT: As a starting point, could you tell us about your academic background and education? Did it all lead to composition, and your work *Three pieces for solo violin*?

Ribić: Currently now, I study violin at Music Academy - University of East Sarajevo in class of Serbian violinist Jovan Bogosavljević, and I prepare myself for studies of Composition next year at the same Faculty. Primarily, I would describe myself as violinist, but violin encouraged me to push and explore my musicality since I was a child. I think that working as a composer really opened my mind and I started to look and analyze music more deeply. I would say that performing is, in a lot of situations, just a small percentage of musicality that I own. Composing gives me a chance to express myself and my inner voice which sometimes, as a violinist, I need to pull back in order for the other composer to come the fore.

HT: On your website, opening quote is "purity and beauty born of simplicity.." by David Unger. Why is this quote important to you?

Ribić: That quote is part of my first professional music critic which I get on my music, and was written after publishing my piece *Threnody: For Melisa* for violin and piano, by Swedish composer, musicologist and music critic David Unger. I think that these words beautifully and very precisely describe my music and my philosophy of music, where sometimes "less is more". I realized that minimalism gives me a chance to put my ego under feet, so I think that my music represents essential me.

HT: You invented MPS (Mutant;PlugSystem), contemporary functional system for preparation of Violin. Could you tell us the journey that led to this invention?

Ribić: MPS or Mutant: PlugSystem is my invention for functional preparation of violin which basically, as title describes, is system for applying specially designed synthetic plugs like "mutants" on violin strings. With preparation, you can get a completely new palette of colors and sounds, percussive effects and also you can imitate other instruments, for example; bells. What is special about it is that you can prepare violin in few seconds on stage without technical problems, like detuning, etc. I tried to convince and show people that violin is much more than "romantic and melodic

instrument". Presentation about MPS will be published this year, with complete manual about using that in contemporary music.

HT: What would be a turning point in your career, which made you think differently about your future?

Ribić: I think that happened when I published my first score of *Three pieces for solo violin* and after few premieres of my first works, when I saw how people react on my music, I realized that I found something new in myself, like inner voice or some strange energy that I lost many years ago, as a child. I found that my vision, something like a personal philosophy of music, was changed since then and through working on myself in one period, I realized that violin and violinism puts my artistic voice in something like a limited room. After I found my music in my spirit, I found a key to open up door and run away immediately.

HT: Any plans you'd like to share with the readers of Balkan Art Scene?

Ribić: Currently, I work on some projects for 2022. I have three commissions that I need to finish in a few months, and also there is lot of concerts and three recital programs which I'm preparing right now. I will return to some projects from last year which are unfinished, like my debut CD with my music.

Bahrudin Srebrenica - We Are Left to Bargain with the Enormous Political Apathy**;**

February 4, 2022

HT: For starters, tell us about your educational background. And, how come you're so strongly connected to both Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Sweden?

Srebrenica: I wouldn't know where to begin if I were to start describing sacrifices my parents undertook to send me to schools. Thanks to them and to my fears of 'not disappointing' that I am currently wrapping up my second master's. The first master is in the science of Criminology that I initially dropped out of and would come to graduate only two years after. I got involved in making theater of the oppressed, and some practical work in Latin America, but before I even had defended my first thesis, I had already enrolled in theatre studies, then performance studies, and then to a documentary film program. I collected ECTS needed for a Master's in arts in the field related to performance studies, theater studies, or film. I picked film, so, currently, I am on my second master thesis on the topic of dramatizations and scripting of human behavior in film and media production. I am also considering PhD., just first I want to take a few years break and make my feature debut. I feel Sweden has given me so much, I was enrolled in the three highest-ranked universities, I have met here some of the dearest persons to my heart, and for sure friends for life, but yet my biggest inspiration is and always was Bosnia. Though, I must say, I feel strongly connected to Colombia as well, Colombia has turned me into an adult.

HT: "iciklo is your latest movie, and what's interesting is that you've worked with non-trained actors, and kids. Could you tell us about the movie, and how your approach as a director took a turn?

Srebrenica: The reason I worked with non-trained actors is that it's a bit harder, and I wanted to train, and as for working with kids, they are just more embodied with realness than adults. *Biciklo* talks about a chapter of a day in the life of a child that is forced to labor. But, like every other child, he still dreams of simple things so when daydreaming collides with duties, he finds himself in trouble. In addition, the boy is

stigmatized for being Roma, as just a kid, he is visibly unfit to that pressure, but copes competitively.

HT: Project that you're currently working on is related to wartime Srebrenica, but it's not particularly a documentary. Any information you can currently share with the readers?

Srebrenica: *The Last Day of My Childhood* (working title) is a long narrative film about my friend Emir Bektić, who is a Bosnian genocide survivor. The film is set mostly in the current time but talks about Emir's experience during the Bosnian genocide. The film incorporates various genres, essentially it is coming of age wartime story, but it will contain theatricality and direct cinema. Since this is such a sensitive topic, collective yet personal, we'll have Emir tell his own story, meaning we don't want to speak in his name, we want to facilitate his own expression. The film is a synecdochic medium, it speaks for all through one. In my opinion, films can alter the present and future, and I surely want Emir's future to be brighter than his childhood. However, there is really still a long way to go before this film is done made. We are still needing a lot more financing.

HT: Any comment on the current film industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and if there's room for a change?

Srebrenica: I don't think there is an industry of film in Bosnia. For the film industry to develop, and there is obvious potential, there needs to be economically progressive political soil, but, Bosnian politicians not only misunderstand the importance of creative industries, they actively obstruct it. Since politicians are not interested in being part of solutions, I think we need to exclude them from the equation, in such a scenario we are left to bargain with the enormous political apathy of young Bosnians, and there we are in this vicious circle. I don't have hope in Bosnian politicians, but I have in young Bosnians generations, and those young people I call for involvement. Let's make a thriving film industry in Bosnia. I have created an annually held film workshop called Bus.Film.Lab but it is open throughout the year. I have also created, with a help of a few friends in Berlin, a film development association B.I.K. Films (Bosnian Independent Kino Films). B.I.K. aims to develop, produce and connect with larger production teams in Europe. The aim of Bus film lab and B.I.K. films is to scout for talent in Bosnia then connect them with producers in Europe. Get in touch on our social media profiles @bus.film.lab @bosnia.independent.kino

Maria Kosmidi - Concepts of Beauty, Filth and Body Are Being Reappropriated**; February 9, 2022**

HT: As a visual artist, is there a certain approach, a style that you lean on?

Kosmidi: My approach is not based to a certain process. Usually something affects me or I am thinking of something, or I am in a certain kind of state with which I just experiment with, either when I start a collage, I take a photo or draw. My inspirations are new landscapes I visit, my friends or new people I meet, stuff I find on the streets or in casual places and they have interesting texture or colors.

HT: Could you tell us something about your latest work? What is the focus, the ideal behind your latest work?

Kosmidi: My latest work is about looking closely at qualities of lust and flesh. I am trying to depict bodies when something happens to them, when fusion with other bodies is making a complex situation where different particles cannot be distinguished, where the concepts of beauty, filth and body are being re-appropriated to show that beauty coexists with filth and that body can perform in many ways.

HT: How long did it take to define your way of narrating a story?

Kosmidi: I don't have a certain way of narrating a story. Every project is unique and I don't know a priori how it will evolve. In general, I make up stories and write poems since I was a kid, maybe because I read a lot of books. Even though my memory is not good at all and that is why I don't remember anything from the books I have read, I think this practice just created for me something like a mental map of stories full of feelings and situations. Influences are very important for anyone who wants to do art.

HT: Feminism in visual arts - how can we tackle this subject to provoke change towards liberation?

Kosmidi: This issue is very complex and I don't have the answer. I think art is a very powerful medium that arises questions and feelings, that makes us see in a way that questions the constructed knowledge. Generally, I am not concerned only about feminism and gender-based issues, but also about all kinds of discriminations, like the persecution of natives away from their land, animal abuse, ravaging of animal and other species, about oneself disposition regarding their body. I am not optimist at all about society and how it handles all these issues. I think art is not enough to encounter them but is very powerful because it can empower people to act. Each one that wants to provoke towards liberation has to act in their way, in their everyday life practices, without fear; even if they provoke a small change.

HT: Any advice for artists just beginning their journey?

Kosmidi: Everyone is different so there is not one way to start one's journey. What helps me being creative is exploring what makes me feel alive, what makes me want to play or to experiment with. This makes me cultivate my own kind of art and give space to my own concerns around topics. And also, being exposed helps me to meet new people and have new influences, experiences and possibilities. I believe art is totally connected with one's everyday life and practices so I try to live truly regarding my own beliefs and way of being, as much as I can.

Florin Ghioca - Theatre Photography Is a Real Job, But More Than That It Is a Way of Living**; February 15, 2022**

Florin Ghioca is one of the most important Romanian photographers and the most famous theater photographer in Romania. Since 2014 he has been a staff photographer of the National Theater in Bucharest. He has had several photography exhibitions, with openings in London (Sadler's Wells), Sarajevo (Preporod Gallery), Bucharest or in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova (at the National Theater). He has held several workshops and masterclasses in theater photography, being invited by the Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts in Chisinau, or by the VSLO International Festival of Visual Arts. He is also a journalist, theater critic and director, collaborator of several theaters and publications in Romania.

HT: What does it mean to be a theater photographer? Is it a real job?

Ghioca: Theatre photography is a real job, but more than that it is a way of living. It is one of the most difficult photographic genres, when you think about all its intricacies: dim lighting, almost non-existent at times; a lot of movement; scenes with multiple actors, wearing black, most of the times against a black background. It's basically a photographer's nightmare; but a good one, if you know how to make the best out of these circumstances and take that shot. But most of all, being a theatre photographer means being passionate to the point of obsession about theater, loving the actors and dedicating oneself to this work, which is so much more than just a push of a button, as some believe. It means knowing a show, knowing how to approach it through the camera lens and expose it to the world!

HT: What does a day in the life of a theatre photographer look like?

Ghioca: It starts in the morning, photographing rehearsals, and ends late in the evening, often at night, after the shows are over when I review what I shot that day and make my selections. This adds up to thousands of photos every week that I take, review, and sometimes even have to post-process. When the photos need to go to print, or to newspapers or will be part of an exhibition, that's when I will do some work on them. But otherwise, I am not a fan of processing: what I see through the lens when I take that shot should reflect in the image you the viewer get to see. That is the truth.

HT: How do you approach a new show?

Ghioca: It starts with the director's first meeting with the actors, the so-called "first reading", which I always attend. I use this time to take the first portraits, get a sense of the mood, and see what the show is about. I go back later when the actors get up from the table and start moving around. It's there in the rehearsal room that I notice the elements that interest me: group scenes, individual scenes, potential portraits, emotional states that the actors might go through while in character. It's my chance to get an overview of the show. The third and final stage of preparations is when the whole rehearsal moves to the stage. That's when costumes, scenery, lights, makeup, etc. come into play, and I understand what I need to do during the official shooting. Knowing all the elements beforehand, I understand where I need to position myself in the room, how to move around to get the best angles. I have to ensure I cover the whole cast, because every actor is important, regardless of the part. It's my "moment of glory" when I know I must get the best photos. And most of the time, I only have one chance to shoot them correctly. But herein lies the skill of the photographer.

HT: You take a lot of pictures. What happens to them in the end?

Ghioca: After a show, I will look over the pictures and make a first selection. I need to make sure that my selection covers all the scenes in the show. When I choose the scenes, there needs to be at least one image for every moment of the show. I will discard somewhere around 100-200 photos. From what is left, I will make the final pick.

HT: How important is lighting design?

Ghioca: It is extremely important. It brings the image together. Let's not forget that photography comes from the Greek words: phōs, meaning light, and graphis, which means writing. It literally translates to „writing with light". Light can make or break a scene, as a good lighting designer will decide what the public sees on a stage. It is very important for a stage photographer to work closely with the lighting designer.

HT: What does theatre have to gain from photography?

Ghioca: Theatre leverages images to create anticipation. Spectators want to get an idea of what they will see before they come to a play. Stage actors, as well, have the opportunity to show their work to the public through photographs. But above all else, photography contributes to our cultural memory. As productions discontinue, artists pass, photography builds the bridge between the present and the past.

HT: What does theater photography mean to you?

Ghioca: It's the joy of my everyday life. It's a way of living. I've spent many days and nights in the theater, which is also why my phone's been set to silent for the past seven years. The first rule in a theater is to turn off your phone. Theater photography is the most beautiful thing that has ever happened to me professionally. The fact that I can spend my days photographing all these wonderful actors is truly a privilege.

David Aparu - Creativity Is Stimulated by Goals**; February 18, 2022**

EscapeArt is a magazine which lets artists promote their work. Magazine is focused on digital age, connecting stories which tackle notions such as digital exhibitions, NFT, and similar. Founder of the magazine, David Aparu, told us about ideas behind *EscapeArt Magazine*, where it could lead, and his own views on arts in 21st century.

HT: Personal question - abruptly! Roots which connect you to the Balkans region are coming from Romania, and currently you're residing in the United Kingdom. When did this geographical transfer happen?

Aparu: I'm actually currently residing in Eppelheim, Germany! I moved out of the UK a few months ago due to my main job (not *EscapeArt*) allowing me to work remotely. I plan to keep moving and create connections around the world as long as I have energy and courage. The geographical change from my Romanian roots happened when I left to study film at university. I miss some parts of my home country and I'm glad I managed to get away from others – I think many people who leave their home country will find themselves in this emotional limbo. I still go and visit relatively often due to family and incredible childhood memories. Most of my dreams happen in the Romanian mountains.

HT: Do you still feel connected to Romanian traditions? Cultures often suck people in without hesitation, so it might be harder to keep the connection to our roots.

Aparu: You are totally right; I completely got sucked by the "global" culture; the multiculturalism of the internet and digital age. Of course, there are incredibly beautiful traditions in the rustic part of Romania which I often like to come back to and admire. On the other hand, I don't feel like I belong to the traditions - or that the traditions belong to me. I am a strong believer of experience as a teacher. What could be a better way of gaining experience other than travelling and understanding different cultures? I understand culture and tradition have their parts to play in developing as a semantic species. Our need to travel and explore works against the conservation of culture and tradition. Some of these neglected folkloric rituals might disappear in time but I don't think of it as a loss of culture – but rather as its evolution. Culture survives when a society; or a single person, is confident in their roots. And no amount of travel or "sucking" from other cultures will be able to deny that I was born and brought up in Romania.

HT: *EscapeArt Magazine* is supporting artists in the 21st century digital era. As a founder and editor-in-chief, could you tell us more about this project? How does it influence the community of artists?

Aparu: By now, you probably figured out that I'm a person that feels drawn to the feeling of escapism. I like to lose myself in cultures, emotions, people and especially in art in all its meaning. *EscapeArt* started as an experiment and attempt to study social media marketing from the perspective of the artist. How does Instagram work? Who is

the target audience for an art magazine? How do you optimize SEO rankings for art articles? For this reason, I had to create a pseudo brand with which I could experiment. In the end I got sucked into the culture I created and began talking to people who would interact with me on various platforms. I like to see *EscapeArt* as a place which reinforces the belief that art in all its forms can be used as a mechanism to cope with the putrefaction of the world around us. Of course, it can also be used to restore the organic energy that the world holds.

HT: How do you manage *EscapeArt*? As an art critique, a community builder, or something completely different?

Aparu: I like to collaborate with people and help other people connect with others. If someone is interested in fashion design, I try to connect them with people I know and make things happen. I then give them the platforms I created to share whatever comes out of the collaboration. …I guess that would be a community builder? I must be honest with you: I'm building this bridge as I cross it.

HT: Any plans you'd like to share with us?

Aparu: I have been secretly recording a podcast with different artists, community leaders and friends. I'm looking forward to share the incredible things that people have said to me but I'm still perfecting the format. More on this later. Another thing which should happen soon is for me to step away from the editor role of the digital magazine. I'd like each issue to be managed by someone different on a topic they are passionate about. They would be the editor for that issue and I'll just help them get it across the line.

HT: Last two years we've been filled with news of pandemics, Covid, death, sickness... Would you say there was also a change in artist's temperament, or even general dynamics in the art world?

Aparu: In the beginning of the pandemic, I believe there was a survey which categorized artists as "not essential". I personally am of the opinion that art can still be essential in moments of survival, and we wouldn't be where we are now as a species without it. There's no better way to express emotion than through music, painting, poetry and so many others. Not only that, but art can be cathartic for the people experiencing it; not just in its creation.

HT: We will probably need a lot of art in order to get through Covid when this is finally over.

Aparu: In terms of a more technical answer, there are a lot of artists that feel undervalued right now and have definitely seen a shift towards the digital way of things in the art world in order to remain relevant: NFTs, virtual galleries, and ecommerce stores are just a few of the things that come to mind.

HT: As a final note, share with us the ways that the art community can be in touch with you.

Aparu: I love to talk to people, you can always reach me directly at david@escapeartmagazine. The other route would be to just go to the website www.escapeartmagazine.com and pick a way to contact us from there (Instagram, contact forms, etc.) Maybe even give us a piece of advice on how to keep the creative juices working and flowing! The second issue of the magazine is actually about creativity and inspiration! You can find it here. The practical and scientific approach would be for us to find a problem we are trying to solve. Creativity is stimulated by goals and coming up with ways to reach our goals; especially when those goals serve our ability to survive. However, my personal advice would be to travel and see the world's offering as your own dedicated box of inspiration.

Ana Milijević - Shaping the Artistic Expression by Continuously Questioning Everyday Life;

February 21, 2022

HT: As a painter, your voice must've been formed by education and all the knowledge acquired. Have you worked hard on keeping your own voice?

Milijević: As stated in the first sentence, I believe that the artist, above all, must have a quality education, which is constantly bettered with new and fresh knowledge, thus shaping the artistic expression by continuously questioning and reshaping the artist's everyday life. My art education began at the Elementary Music School where I had discovered (or awakened) my passion for art. Although I have replaced music with the fine arts, painting and design, I believe that my music education was crucial for escaping my comfort zone, acquiring work habits and creating my own artistic expression. Eventually my artistic tendencies changed and evolved, so I decided to pursue different expressions at the High School of Applied Arts, followed by the Academy of Fine Arts – but with the same zeal, ambition and commitment, crafting a mosaic of artistic expressions from pieces of hard work and determination.

HT: Your latest series of paintings is developed from everyday life; it presents how common it is. Would you elaborate the topic?

Milijević: I completed my studies during the first wave of COVID-19. These unprecedented circumstances and trying times gave me – and many others – enough time to delve deeper into important matters and topics. I questioned the position of man in modern society. What are the fears, needs and emotions of the modern man? The countless Zoom meetings have helped technology to consume our lives more than ever before. For better or for worse. My interest in the position of man in the present deepened in the following year. I realized that man was living faster than ever before, and felt the need to portray this defiance of time in my paintings. What inspired me were the 'live' pictures on our mobile phones. My paintings presuppose the summing up of time, the moments that are imposed on us, moments which are fast, moments which we are unable to receive and place in a natural chronological order. Information and hazy movements, in contrast, bombard the image from all angles and sides – describing modern life.

HT: You're doing a master's degree in Creative Industries, in Belgrade. How did you choose that journey?

Milijević: Considering that connecting the theory and contemporary practice offered by the Faculty of Media and Communication will supplement my previously acquired knowledge at the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, I applied for a master's degree in Creative Industries. As far as my own experience is concerned, I would say that it is not enough to just understand the theory, the history of art or to know the nature of a particular art medium. Today, in the age of hyper-life, the role of creative industries, the arts in communication and economics is becoming more and more significant. Therefore, it is important to turn cultural needs into interests. Unfortunately, creative thinking has lost its place. That is the case in my country – Bosnia and Herzegovina. I strongly believe and strive to overturn this phenomenon, and therefore have chosen this master's program in order to apply my knowledge and competence to extract art from the forgotten sections of magazines, TV programs and lifeless art exhibitions. I believe that the artist should possess this knowledge so that his works would not remain useless in a dusty corner of his studio.

HT: Digital painting is one of your focuses lately, and since we're living in a digital world, did it change the ways of communicating the messages?

Milijević: The works I mentioned in the previous questions speak precisely about the interrelationship of the two concepts: art and technique. The desire to explore digital painting stems from many years of research about traditional media. In my attempt to dissect digital media, I have opted to examine and explore graphic design.

This path has definitely altered the way my messages are communicated. If we talk about the context of a work of art, the work itself created in the digital medium is by default different from the traditional one. It is created much faster, inside a virtual studio within which the painter has inexhaustible paints and brushes. Like everything around us, this medium gives us the ability to be faster, more accurate, and allows us to carry the studio anywhere we go as long as we have a drawing tablet by our side. In addition to these features that facilitate the creative process, I always claim that both media can improve, but never replace each other, which means that I will in the foreseeable future create with both a brush and a digital pen.

Kristina Kinkela Valčić - Process of Creating Abstract Art Brings Feelings of Freedom and Healing**; February 28, 2022**

Kristina was born in 1990, in Rijeka (Croatia). She currently lives in Opatija where she works as an interior designer. Still, Kristina invests every single moment of her free time in painting.

HT: When did the urge for visual arts start? How did your development journey go?

Kinkela Valčić: I have been expressing myself artistically my entire life. Drawing, painting, making paper models was my favorite way of having fun in my childhood. I remember that I had my box with crayons in every house in my neighborhood. Yes, I grew up in such a good place and I was blessed with so many wonderful people around me. That probably gave me the foundations for the person that I become. I always knew where my roots are, and the fact that I have a safe base to come back to gave me a lot of courage on my journey. After receiving my high school diploma as an interior designer, studying at the Academy of Applied Arts in Rijeka was a decision that came very naturally. Studying is never easy but it is easier when you are doing something that you love and something that you are enjoying. I received my MA in Art Education from the sculpture department with a thesis about urban interactive sculpture. In my college years, I was more concerned with sculpture and photography. I never find myself as exclusively sculptor or painter. I believe that there is the right moment for everything and you just have to follow your inner instinct; for me, that is a formula for being genuine.

In the last few years painting prevailed. I slowly evolved as an artist and parallelly as a scientist. I am also a PhD student in Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, which satisfied my inner need for learning and progress combined with my love for the homeland. My thesis is concerned with historical changes in conceptions of the cultural identity of the Kastav region, which is the region where I grew up. The guiding line is that identities are a result of negotiations that these facts reflect in my artwork also, so I am letting my inner instinct drive me through the process of painting. Through my artwork, I can observe changes through different life periods.

HT: You are an expressionist painter. So, tell us about your latest series of paintings. Is there a story behind it? Or is it a flow of emotions and thoughts?

Kinkela Valčić: The latest painting editions are abstract imaginary landscapes, leastwise that I call them like that because they remind me of some kind of harmonious landscapes. They are not inspired by nature - they arise directly from my internal emotional states into visual form. Visually they evolve from multiple, more or less transparent, layers of paint and other media that I use. The entire creating process is very intuitive and intimate. That indicates the fact that my identity and inner states are crucial motivators. For me, creating process is the state of ultimate feeling of freedom with an almost healing effect. Finally, the observers are free to feel and experience the result in their way. Considering the fact that art is such a powerful tool for making changes I support art that points up social, ecological, political, and other existential problems. At the same time, there should be art that makes your life more beautiful and art that runs your imagination in unpredictable ways.

HT: How did you choose the style which currently dominates your work?

Kinkela Valčić: It came along. When you are constantly working you are not aware of the position where you are at the certain moment. When I started to paint more actively, I was calculating and making a lot of sketches in advance. From the present point of view, I was thinking too much, and enjoying less. I was burdened with perfection and focused on the result. Now I'm focused on the painting process and the final result comes by itself. It needs time for realizing that perfection is in progress and constantly exploring new techniques and media, not in the result. I cannot say that I chose the style, I believe that the style chose me. My mission is to spontaneously bring those codes to the surface, and if those codes should have a name, then expressionism is a good term because I am expressing myself through my paintings.

From a technical point of view, I'm preparing all my canvases myself; from wooden frames to canvas stretching. An important detail is that the finished work implies completely painted edges, so there is no need for framing and additional equipment.

HT: What are your plans, future steps in your career?

Kinkela Valčić: Well, I do have a lot of wishes. One of them is to bring my doctoral studies to an end. When I started my doctoral studies, I had no idea the impact it would have on me as a person and an artist. Even though it was sometimes distressing I pushed my boundaries and I'm grateful for that. I wish to paint more, learn more, exhibit more and evolve as an artist. I have already started projects, which deserve to be realized in full scope. One project is my monochromatic series of paintings which I believe will sum up the ultimate essence of abstraction. I'm looking forward to experimenting with colors that I didn't use so far. There are also so many techniques I would love to try and incorporate them in my painting manner.

You can follow my journey on my Instagram profile @kristinakv.art and web page. I appreciate every feedback I receive from my collectors and fellow artists.

Sovran Nrecaj - Curios to Get to Hear More of Shuttered Voices, Left Behind Closed Doors**; March 4, 2022**

HT: When and how did urge for filmmaking start?

Nrecaj: I remember myself with a photo camera since I became conscious. So, it all started from there. Later, when I was around 15 years old, I got my first kind of a "professional" photo camera and I mainly shot and shoot portraits up to date but always having in mind the utilizing of some sort of concepts I had on the back of my head.

Sooner rather than later, those concepts needed a broader sphere to lay themself in, that's when I first thought of film.

I didn't know much about it at that time and I wasn't any kind of cinephile, but it came out as a need to express myself. Then came this day when I found myself writing concepts not for photography but something bigger, something moving, it was film – the most complex art form.

I'm sticking to film but I have to state that I see myself as a very fluid being, so don't be surprised if you see me painting or dancing the other day.

HT: Tell us about your latest film *Sea by the river and river by the sea*, why is this story important?

Nrecaj: *Sea by the river and river by the sea* is my latest film, it is a very personal film, it is a retrospective of my curiosity towards a transitional society such as Kosovo.

I see my film as an objection to a society which only glorifies "big arms" heroes as if we were living in a Marvel film, while in *Sea by the river* the "hero" is a mother. I was always curios to get to hear more of those shuttered voices, which are left behind closed doors and never put on spotlight. So to speak, it is personal because I grew up in such a setting of life, Lume (main character in film) could be my mother, such as Mal (son in film) could be my brother or my friend.

HT: You had several collaborations within the field of photography. Any intertwining motifs with films you're creating?

Nrecaj: For me, photography is what first comes to mind, then later it starts moving and becomes a film. So yes, most of the photo work I do (especially portraits), are a starting point or a reference for my later work into films. In the end, it all comes to emotions, so for me it is important to save them and try to combine them in between, in order to achieve some other emotion and vice versa.

HT: Tell us about your plans in cinema industry.

Nrecaj: I am happy to be soon finishing the production phase of my documentary named *Green Desert*. I think it will be ready to be streaming in fall of 2022, that's it for the first half of the year.

Also, another thing I'm working on is writing my first feature. I am soon to finish the first draft of script. It is called *By the river, beyond the sea*… and some other audiovisual projects I can't mention at the moment.

Darko Jovičić — Purpose of Creation is the Intimacy of One Talking to Oneself**; April 18, 2022**

HT: Street art was a part of your first steps into art world. What made you start your journey as a street artist? What were your first choices when it comes to shapes and colors?

Jovičić: My street art journey began through graffiti, in elementary school, in 2006, when my friend and I became interested in that culture, observing works that were largely created in Tuzla at that time, where the graffiti scene was very developed and active. We bought two sprays one day and set off for the first time on an adventure on the roof of a garage. From that day it was a complete obsession, and everything was developing with great intensity. So, this is also the first choice when it comes to colors and shapes, everything was focused on letters, typography and experimenting with colors.

HT: Product design is your current niche of work. Is it too consumer-oriented? Or did you find a way to implement all the creativity?

Jovičić: I am consumer oriented as much as I think it is necessary. This refers to the quality of the product, its use, marketing, and communication with customers. But I also try to implement creativity and leave my signature in each product, I try not to be similar to others, and that the specific market of our country, does not take away my creativity and turn my product into a uniform copy. I try to create something unique, as much as possible. And through the brand, I try to establish that balance, between our streetwear fashion scene, and the world scene, and of course, I try to feel that freedom in creating every product.

HT: Brand you're currently developing is called BALANCER, and it's focused on urban lifestyle and bold colors and lines. Would you tell us a background story of the brand, and direction of its development?

Jovičić: The BALANCER brand was officially created at the end of the manic year 2020, and the idea was born somehow naturally from the art concept. I had a desire to transfer these abstract forms from prints to real, physical form. I teamed up with my girlfriend Dunja, who was (and still is) my biggest support, and we released the first collection of wooden and plexiglass earrings. After that, we decided to expand the portfolio with various products. This created the need to switch sales to more channels, so we have established cooperation with several concept stores, one of which is in Belgrade. Dunja oversees the business and social side of the brand, and I am in charge of the creative side. Although, it is fair to say that the final product is the result of mutual ideas and desires. Sometimes one of us comes up with an idea for a product, sometimes the other, then we sit down and agree on what the product will look like. Our main goal is a quality, durable product, simple and functional design to which we will add that characteristic BALANCER signature. We imagine it as a product that will stand out from the crowd. Also, we are not focused on large, mass production, but on limited quantities. Therefore, most products are made to order, except for those found in certain shops. We do not want to pile up materials or create unnecessary waste. We research and learn about materials, because we want the BALANCER product to be wearable and usable for as long as possible. As for the brand, we plan to collaborate with some other shops in the region, we are considering opening our own, and we are arranging collaborations with some other small brands from BiH. We have just released a new collection of backpacks - BRUTAL BAG, a bag that we presented for the first time last year and which received a very good response and support, and this time it is inspired by traditional Bosnian motifs. When it comes to the art concept, I started a small tour of solo exhibitions called Equilibrium. The tour started its journey in Zagreb at the end of March, and continues in Tuzla on April 22, then in Mostar on May 6. Also, I am in negotiations with some other galleries in BiH, and galleries in Berlin and Munich. So far, this concept has met with very good and positive feedback, and I am really proud of it, I hope it will remain so.

HT: What about your visual arts purposes? There must be something happening there, in terms of developing inner changes to the final outcome of manifesting it in your artwork.

Jovičić: Just as creation comes from within me, so the purpose of that creation is to talk to oneself. The concept is very intimate. Through it, I try to achieve balance, peace, which we all strive for as human beings. The pursuit of peace is in fact an escape from the extremes that have followed me through my life so far, and that have led me to various dangers, retreats into myself or total asociality. When I say extremes, it mostly refers to graffiti culture. That culture is extremely creative and liberating, but at the same time full of adrenaline and danger, which you become aware of only after some time.

Hence, I call escape - a state of consciousness, in which I can finally say "ok, I'm aware of it and I want to continue to be a part of it, but let's eliminate all that danger." I'm still active and committed, it's my first love and I really enjoy it. And it will probably stay that way for a long time. Also, another important reason for creating is that I have always strived to be a person who tries to meet everyone's expectation and be there for another, and all of this often left me energetically exhausted and empty at the end of the day. I am learning to be there for myself, to set boundaries and to appreciate my moment of peace. Through the BALANCER concept, I create my world of perfect dualism and connect all these extremes into one point of perfect balance in which I feel peace. People experience my artworks in different ways, and I like to listen to their feedback, especially because I can really recognize in them a part of myself that I consciously (or unconsciously) transferred to those artworks. And of course, therein lies all the beauty of creation.

Mateas Pares - How Do We Move Forward as Protagonists in Our Own Narratives, With No Absolute Truth**; May 17, 2022**

HT: Sculptor and graphic designer from Stockholm found his way to the Balkans, to be more precise, to Sarajevo. How did your art journey develop in this geographical direction?

Pares: A few years back, I was writing extensively about my art in order to create a more organized understanding of what I was doing, and I wrote a lot about the idea of conflict as an essential part of life. At the same time, I stumbled across the Instagram account of KUMA, a Sarajevo based organization which is working in the intersection of art and journalism, specifically dealing with the subject of conflict. The coincidence was just too good to ignore so I contacted them and one thing led to another. All of a sudden, I found myself on a plane to Sarajevo to attend a week of speeches and excursions, which they organized. I knew I wanted to do a project around conflict, and even if it didn't pan out as I planned, it eventually turned out to be a project. I contacted National Gallery about it and they liked what I wanted to do, and almost two years later I have an exhibition there. It sounds so straightforward and easy when condensing it to this short amount of text, but it all feels quite surreal actually.

HT: Your work is often settled as a depiction between collective narrative and personal narrative. How do you define, or maybe contradict, each in your works?

Pares: When I changed my creative trajectory towards art, I knew that one thing I wanted was to move away from conceptual work. I had worked with conceptual creativity all my career and couldn't stand one more smart concept. I was more interested in letting the works be instruments for expressing something, rather than communicating something. Having said that, when I do projects, I tend to have a theme that informs the work, and which usually end with me posing an open question. In that sense I frame the interpretation of the artworks for the viewer. But the theme is still only a layer on top of the artwork; the artwork is not dependent on the theme to be experienced. What I'm trying to say is that it is more the themes that evolve around the idea of the collective narrative and personal narrative. The works themselves just exist in the room, as bodies that you get affected by in one way or another.

HT: National Gallery in Sarajevo will host your latest exhibition *The Sevdah Tone*. Could you tell us the background story of this installation and sound production?

Pares: *The Sevdah Tone* is the result of the failed attempt to go to Sarajevo for a week in 2020 and gain enough knowledge of the war in former Yugoslavia to understand

what effects a conflict can have on identity — on an individual level as well as on a societal level — after it has been overcome, in order to create an art project. Since conflicts seem to be interweaved with our history, I was curious to understand if, why, and how, we need the conflict in order to move forward, just like the protagonist in works of narratives, such as books and films, needs it in order to move forward. Although, what soon became apparent was that contrary to my belief the conflict was not over, it had merely changed appearance. The war had simply been replaced by a combination of a suppressing of the past, and individuals and groups arguing over the war's historiography. The paths to create their post-war identities were corrupted by truths and lies seamlessly intertwined by ignorance, self-deception, and dishonesty. I noticed that as a consequence of the approaching failure, I started to force my preconceived beliefs into the reality I faced. To create and maintain my identity as a certain artist, I corrupted my own path with truths and lies seamlessly intertwined by my very own ignorance, self-deception, and dishonesty. A question, forming a new project, emerged: If our identity is built on a set of beliefs, and these beliefs are built on what we think are facts about reality, but what they really are, are products of inevitable conscious or unconscious distortions of reality, how do we move forward as protagonists in our own narratives, when we realize that we will never reach an absolute truth, ultimately being forced to live with identities built on our own made up reality? The title is inspired by Shepard Tone, which is an auditory illusion of a tone that either ascends or descends in pitch, and due to its unique construction, never reaches a crescendo, resulting in being stuck ascending or descending forever. The sound installation consists of a choir trying to sing Sevdah but is as if stuck forever not capable to move past the first syllable. The ten wall-works work as physical manifestations of the sound installation. Consisting of the same twelve fragmented sculptures — a total of 120 sculptures — rearranged differently in each work, the sculptures seem as if floating around, inevitably only capable of reaching incomplete and unfinished narratives, making them susceptible for personal interpretations, or truths.

HT: You run the exhibition project StudyForArtPlatform. What motivated you to create it, and how did the public react?

Pares: For me it was a combination of creating another type of energy in my professional life, which normally is quite lonesome, and the identified need for artists to have another platform to exhibit and explore their art practice. When I got the chance to take over the space, I immediately saw the potential to create this exhibition platform. And it was quite a success from the day one. As you probably know as well, the art world can be quite closed, so it was a very welcomed initiative.

HT: Any plans for the future you'd like to share with the readers?

Pares: Well, if you are in Venice in July, I have a duo exhibition together with the Norwegian artist Tim Høibjerg, and if you are in Stockholm in Autumn, you can both come and check out my exhibition at Taverna Brillo, or come by StudyForArtPlatform, where there are three great exhibitions planned.

mersiha messiha — Exploring New Forms of Expression Within Art Disciplines**; July 4, 2022**

mersiha messiha aka Mesihović is a trans-disciplinary artist born in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Out of her engagement in the arts, politics and interest in renewal thorough a

collision of the two, a nomadic platform, CIRCUITDEBRIS is born. CIRCUITDEBRIS is dedicated to conceptualizing her collaboration across disciplines and her passion for research-oriented praxis and community engagement.

HT: CIRCUITDEBRIS is an interdisciplinary practice, with roots in Bosnia and Herzegovina but located in New York. Which forms does the practice cover?

Messiha: I am fascinated by re-imagining possibilities of what "already is" and can see myself exploring a new form of expression within my primary discipline, or I will dabble in unfamiliar territory to discover particular element/s I am imagining in the larger constellation or the format that I choose the work to exist in.

HT: You are named a “refugee artist”, can you explain what was your journey? As a refugee, it must have created a difference in communicating your message with the audience.

Messiha: Experiencing war, destruction and displacement leave intense marks on the body. In my work, I develop various strategies for listening and honoring the knowledge of the body and that which needs to be told through me. And for many years that was what came through me, the story of what it could mean to move as a refugee in Europe and in the West.

HT: Art that you create is developed with elements of dance, sound, film, drawing, writing, and ethnography to address larger social issues in the globalized world. Could you tell us more about these issues, what are you focused on?

Messiha: I am fascinated by the human body. I continuously explore its possibilities. I believe it can offer us new ways to imagine in regards to how we organize our societies as we move into the future.

HT: Share with us your latest projects and plans for 2022. Has the mass digitization during pandemics created a difference in your plans?

Messiha: 2022 has been a beautiful year already. I had the opportunity to come together with some wonderful Bosnian artists and colleagues. I did a music film for Cielo Hemon - the alter ego of Aleksandar Hemon known for *Nowhere Man* and *The Lazarus Project*, also a co-writer of *The Matrix Resurrections* which was directed by the visual artist Šejla Kamerić. It will be screened at the Sarajevo Film Festival. I am currently working on a new interdisciplinary project taking shape between the cities of Gothenburg and Barcelona, in which I am collaborating with two capacious Barcelona based artists: drummer, percussionist Vasco Trilla and multi-instrumentalist/composer Alex Reviriego, organized by Folkstaden, ECRN and Urban Konst at Göteborg Konsthall in Gothenburg in collaboration and presented by Coincidences on a rooftop in Barcelona, on July 22. And then later in the fall, I am in residency at KRAK, the cultural center in Bihać and extremely excited to be working in close proximity to Bosnian historian/curator Irfan Hošić. I also have a new project involving my sister Zana Messia as a composer and my mother Aida Mesihović as a dramaturg; I am telling a new “story”, related to my origin and ethnography of Bosnia and Herzegovina and in which I find so much richness, inspiration and material for my art praxis. I am especially curious about the possibilities of emerging technologies like augmented and virtual reality, projection mapping and contextual sensors, to express my ideas around expanded corporeality I work with and the movement methodology I have been developing for the past decade. I have an ongoing collaboration with Brooklyn based NEONEON, a team of experimental digital artists, Ray Weitzenberg and Andrey Radovski. They were involved with my recent project Sevdah body that takes various shapes and formats and is also ongoing

research which I was excited to present at the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo, right prior to the pandemic and the shutdown.

PUNKura* — Free from Censorship and Far from Established Mainstream**; July 11, 2022**

*PUNKura** is a new Sarajevan maga(zine) that's printed in A5 format. It covers underground arts, culture, and lifestyle, focusing on topics such as visual art, music, nightlife, graffiti, skateboarding, ecology, relationships and the lack of public spaces. *PUNKura** is founded and run by Nardina Zubanović and Adrian Pecotić, who started this project about a year ago. It's a 52 pages document of Sarajevo's scene, "elevating its creative people and works in a way they usually aren't and looking directly at the challenges that exist." (Explained by the artists)

HT: How did you two come up with the concept of the *PUNKura** magazine? Why the name "PUNKura*" with the asterisk?

Nina: Well, in zine culture, it's quite common to have a provocative and rebellious name, so we also wanted to have a cool and unique one… After a few ideas that were just stupid swearing, we came up with "Punkuratz". Then, we cut the "tz" because it seemed a bit too much. That was perfect cuz it had punk in its meaning even though we are not just a punk magazine – actually we are not defined by genre so that makes it punk itself… We have an attitude that's like punk; free from censorship and interested in what's not just fake or part of the popular and established mainstream, but what's true and real – underground. But let's go back to the name... When we wrote down Punkura* - the name took on several meanings that made it cooler and more original since it can be still interpreted as a rebellious Punkuratz in the free meaning of being "full of everything," "it's enough" or "too much," and "loads of…" But it also means Punk-Ura as "Punk hour" or "It's time for Punk," as well as Punk-Kura., like "Punk is healing." That * gave more meanings to our name for interpretation, which helped it be the final decision. It's actually cool that everyone can make up their own meaning… Also, this, first time publishing, our letters on a cover are colored pink... Pink-ura (laugh)

Adrian: The concept of the magazine evolved pretty naturally, I think. We started out knowing that Sarajevo needs a magazine for young people and wanting to make a zine about underground art and music. And when you add those two ideas, you basically get *PUNKura**. I don't think we can, or really want to, explain the concept of *PUNKura** using strict labels. We're not a traditional magazine, nor a 'pure' zine either (even though we're inspired by both). We're happy mixing mediums and mixing different types of content, having serious art on one page and a crossword on the other. So, if I had to boil down the concept of *PUNKura** to one sentence, I'd say something like: *PUNKura**, a street paper that refuses to have any strict borders about what a street paper is and what can go into one. And so far as the name goes, the name is just a good name... it has a ring to it.

HT: Adrian, what kind of content are we going to see in *PUNKura**?

Adrian: Like Nina said, *PUNKura** isn't defined by genre. That goes for genres of writing and art as well. We'll put anything we can print into the magazine if we like it enough. That means we're just as likely to publish a short story or poem as an interview with someone interesting. And we're just as likely to publish something that's written in English as in Bosnian… Whichever language fits the story best, we use. But we have to be guided by what's happening and what people are interested in. That's because we're trying to represent, make some kind of document of, the subcultural scene as it exists. For example, there's a big, and growing, skate scene in Sarajevo – that's something we've got to cover. The nice thing about having a magazine is that we also get to include topics and people that we think should be more popular. Some of them in this issue, like the painter Mirza Čizmić, are from Sarajevo but more popular on a worldwide level than a local one… It's nice to make introductions.

HT: You are currently working on "The Special Edition", a pilot issue which will get its support through crowdfunding. What can the readers expect in this issue?

Adrian: Expect the unexpected. We made a very free maga/zine, in the sense that you're never quite sure what's going to be on any of its 52-pages.

Nina: In a time of ruling social networks, and so many things going on in a virtual world, we decided to make a paper in a physical form for a reason. The central topic of our Special Edition is space in a wider context where it can mean physical space, public/private space, virtual space…and even the space of memory. If you closely look at our artists' works, you might find them communicating in direct or indirect ways with public and private space. Like, for example, we have two works by one of the best-known performance artists, Vlasta Delimar (1956.), *Ovo sam bila ja 1980. kada je umro drug Tito* (1980.) and *40 godina poslije* (2021.), who has often used her naked body as a medium to perform in public spaces during 70s and now, and a work by Mak Hubjer (1993.), *Traces of New Realism* (Akcija Split/Riva 2021.), who also uses public space in his artistic practice. Then we have artists with different artistic sensibilities, like Dalila Manso (1991.), whose work *In the kitchen* illustrates an intimate and common day life, private space and situation… You can read the names of all of the contributors on the *PUNKura** cover photo. They come from different backgrounds and they are different generations but the thing which connects them is that they are current artists and writers who create - here and now, and they are great in what they do - no matter are they at the start of their careers like the young and very talented Hana Grozdanić (1998.) or already established artists like Mirza Čizmić (1985.), a great BiH artist who lives in Helsinki and whose works are exhibited in ART galleries worldwide next to Leonardo Da Vinchi and Chagall. In the Special Edition, you can also see works of important artists on Sarajevo's current scene, who live and work in BiH, like one of our best graphic designers and illustrators Boris Stapić (1977.), the work of conceptual artist Bojan Stojčić (1988.), the well-known street artist and painter Rikardo Druškić (1990.), unique photographs by Tajana Dedić-Starović (1993.) from Banja Luka, funny mixed collages by Kasja Jerlagić (1996.) and the Graffiti Crew - STF… as well as photos of foreign Lithuanian artist Gabrielė Žukauskaitė or Sam Sabourin who are passionately interested in Sarajevo…

Adrian: I want to circle back for a second and talk about why we're selling the Special Edition on IndieGoGo. People might think that there's a contradiction between being an underground maga/zine and being on a platform like IndieGoGo. There is a point to that, but it misses the larger point. Nina and I are trying to create a maga/zine that's both sustainable in the long run and independent. We can't do that on our own. We need support from the city… It's hard and expensive work to make a magazine. IndieGoGo is just an easy and accessible way of gathering support from people who believe in our project.

HT: Nina, making the choice of having the form of a DIY magazine must have a background story – why a zine?

Nina: We wanted to have an original design that's not a usual magazine design, and most zines are DIY style. Some of the pages I designed in a really DIY way by really cutting paper and gluing it to a surface, like paper collages. In my artistic practice, I've been doing paper collages lately, so it was kinda natural for me. Anyways, it was too hard and would cost tons of money and time to write, glue and cut every single article by hand and then scan it later… so not all our pages follow that old-school zine style. I personally designed the Billain interview, "People from the street make a difference," and Arnel Šarić Šaran's text, *Ne Razumijem*. The designer followed my idea in a digital form… Also, our "inside covers" are literally graffitied surfaces that I photographed while walking around, which fits since the maga(zine) itself is about the streets of Sarajevo...

HT: In what ways do you filter and choose the topics which you cover in the *PUNKura** maga(zine)?

Nina: Well, the starting idea was to cover topics which people would be interested in to explore, read and identify with. When I say people, I mean people of all generations. We want to connect people of all generations with similar interests… to create a sort of a document and a platform that can bring people together in one place - a physical newspaper. Both people who currently exist in Sarajevo and on the world scene. People who are part of the subcultural scene might never have met before, which is possible because in Sarajevo, there's no established base or any kind of subcultural center (which in future we would like to create). In this issue you can read our interviews, thoughts and ideas of aware, awake, and true people like one of Sarajevo best DJ-s and producers, Billain, on which Sarajevo is very proud of, young and great skater Dino Pepić, band Moca i Biznismeni, story of Saša Džino, poetry by great poet Marija Šuković and Sarajevan dramaturg and poet Adnan Lugonić… as well as intellectual text of BoriŠa Mraović *Posljedice i politike platforme* and intrigue text about underground scene - wrote by frontman of band Popik - journalist Arnel Šarić Šaran which I previously mentioned. I personally pick local characters to work with or interview and Adrian picks more international characters interested in the city of Sarajevo (Sam Sabourin, Gabriela Manda Seith ...), which makes sense. We normally come with the ideas, communicate them together and then look for a person best for writing it. In the future, we hope that maga(zine) will be more interactive and that people themselves will send us their art works and essays and we will publish the best.

Adrian: I'm a pretty old-fashioned editor, and choosing stories comes down to three simple things—quality, fit, and value. Is a work—whether it's an essay, art, or a comic strip—one that we'll be proud to publish? Does it fit into the magazine or will look strange beside everything else we're publishing? And, most importantly, does it have some value for our readers? Value in this context can mean useful information, or it can be something that makes someone look at something in a new way, or something that causes someone to feel something. What's unique about *PUNKura** compared to all the other editing work I've done is how free we can be in looking for many different types of values.

HT: How can people submit their work to your maga/zine? Is there a certain way to start a collaboration with you?

Adrian: Yeah, we have a new email address that's just for submissions! It's punkura.submissions@gmail.com. We'd be incredibly happy for any of your readers to reach out to us personally. That can be by sending artwork or a pitch to our email, via our instagram profiles @punkura_ and punkura_official2027, or by meeting us at some kafana and saying, "Hey, I have an idea for *PUNKura**." We're also looking for collaborations with small or big local businesses who have the same approach as us and

a similar public. Like, if you're making your own craft beer or have a skate- or print-shop…, we're interested in working together. We need more people working on things on their own, and we need to support each other.

Nina: Our magazine is about to start its life on Sarajevan streets and perhaps build a new/current cultural identity. We've all been whining for so long about the subcultural and cultural scene of Sarajevo not growing or being bad. With this kind of maga/zine we all can help it get to the place it deserves. But we need to do it together. It's very important at this point that people support *PUNKura** by sharing idea and donating, so we can continue publishing and make "something" like Adrian says (in our video) "that will last". You can see the whole video of ours and get a *PUNKura**'s "Special Edition" on IndieGoGo together with our perks like cool *PUNKura** T-shirts, hoodies… done by the best quality print-shop, PRINTMANIA, which are at this moment our only sponsors. To order and support *PUNKura** from any part of the world the only thing you need is your card, not even online banking. Get your issue NOW.

Merita Morić — Music Is Universal Language That Connects Us All**; July 18, 2022**

HT: Music is a way of communicating thoughts and emotions. When did you start to lean into it? How did you connect to music at your beginnings?

Morić: I started at a very young age, first time I was singing in public when I was 5, but I think I started even earlier to connect and to feel the music. My family made some videos during the war, when I was maybe 3 years old and I was already singing. For me, music and art in general, is an escape from our reality to some more beautiful and peaceful reality where there is place for everyone, no matter the skin color, nationality, religion or anything else.

HT: How did your visit and education in Spain profile you and your musical choices?

Morić: Spain is so special and full of art and artist everywhere. There is a lot of street art, especially in Granada, so the culture is everywhere. Music, architecture and the history of this place just make you feel as if you were a time traveler and you woke up in a different century. I have chosen Spain for my Erasmus studies because of that. I was probably the only Bosnian student of French language in Spain ever, but I learned not only about these two languages but also about flamenco and about Spanish culture which was actually my idea. To share music with different profiles of people is what inspires me. I met musicians from Greece, England, Belgium, France, Germany, and Israel who were there to learn about flamenco, and you realize that the music is an universal language that connect us all.

HT: *Flamenco Balcánico* is your latest album published this year. Album is a blend of Spanish and Bosnian music. Could you tell us more about this project?

Morić: Project *Flamenco Balcánico* started with this amazing guitarist, maestro Jerónimo Maya, while I was in Spain. We tried to create a new sound that would unite these styles. We agreed that flamenco and Balkan music have a lot of things in common, especially in the way they can make us feel when you listen to them. They can transmit extremely deep emotions. Also, we know that during the history, Spain and Bosnia met in 15th century when Sephardic Jews came in Bosnia bringing with them their culture, music and sound that affected sevdah as we know it today. So, the fusion between flamenco and sevdah is very natural. Also, with other Balkan styles because it's music that's been played by gypsies just as flamenco, and that is another thing in common that made this fusion so beautiful. We recorded first in studio Pavarotti in

Mostar and then in Long play studio in Sarajevo. I am very happy and proud that we recorded in the best studios in the country. The sound is really amazing and for me it was very important. In the future, the plan is to make a tour and promote the album, but we still don't have exact dates.

HT: Duo 'Hector & Merita' already had tours in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Any plans for the Balkan region or Europe?

Morić: Hector and I recently became parents so now we are more trio than duo. We play for our son but he is still young and one of us has to stay home and take care of him which means it's more complicated to do concerts together, but we play for friends and family and we practice music so I hope we will be back doing concerts together.

HT: You are currently residing in Paris, and I'm sure readers would love to know if you have more plans when it comes to connecting French spirit with Balkan roots.

Morić: People here are amazed by the Balkan music and I have some plans to do projects with French musicians. In Paris, the fusion is very common because you can find musicians from all around the world playing so many different styles and they have excellent level of knowledge and practice. They are curious about new sounds and I'm very happy to live in a place like that because one can learn and be free at the same time which I think is essential for making a progress.

AymoLive - Removing Barriers to Access the Arts from Every Corner of the World**; July 26, 2022**

HT: AymoLive is a type of concept where artists are presented in a live video, but it's not archived as it usually goes with live events on social media. How did you come up with this idea? And why, exactly, to be left without archived material to watch later?

AymoLive: Yes, the streams are really live and the content is not saved or archived. The goal is to create a connection in the moment, similar to how you would if you attended an event in person. Performance art, storytelling, poetry, music… it's all a way of communication that allows people from different cultures and generations to communicate via images, sounds and stories. For us, art is something spontaneous, something that is created in the moment. Both from the perspective of artists and audiences, real-time performances tend to be more casual, spontaneous and uncensored, making it feel more natural and exciting. Also, there is that social component where artists can directly engage with their fans via live chat which not only enables fans to communicate with their favorite artist, but also makes the whole experience much more interactive.

HT: Digitization is a process which was fast-forwarded during the pandemic. Have you managed such a tempo in your personal dynamics as artists? Has it created any change for you?

AymoLive: Well, the pandemic certainly created a vacuum in the world of art and culture. Theaters were closed, as were art exhibits, concerts were cancelled and festivals postponed. There is no doubt that this put a lot of artists in an unprecedented situation and challenged them to rethink how they present their content. Digitalization and transition to online events surely gave us the opportunity to continue enjoying the beauty of art during lockdowns; however, the demand for online events has been increasing for some time now. The pandemic simply highlighted the opportunity to use streaming as a tool to provide greater access to the arts. Now, when things are slowly

getting back to “normal”, the demand for online events is still here. We see online events as a complement to in-person events, not as a replacement. As emerging artists continue face challenges of how to reach and connect with wider audiences, we continue to work towards removing barriers to access the arts by providing artists a stage where they can present their art and audiences can experience art from every corner of the world.

HT: Independent artists are your focus group for AymoLive performances. Is there a geographical location which you prefer?

AymoLive: Independent and emerging artists and art organizations are our focus group. We strongly support diversity and believe in the beauty and peculiarity of cultural and artistic expression of every country, town or individual. Our mission is to connect emerging art scenes from around the world to foster collaboration and make art and culture available to everyone, regardless of geographical location.

HT: Artists which you collaborate with are visual artists, poets, musicians… What are your latest activities?

AymoLive: AymoLive is open to all types of artforms and we’ve hosted poets, storytellers, visual artists, musicians, actors, plus others. Currently we’re putting a little more focus on a spoken word and performance art. Our goal is to provide opportunities and access to what we believe to be underserved areas in the arts, especially when it comes to online performances. Not long ago, a group of young poets from the Balkans, known as the Temple of Poets got together on AymoLive and came up with the so-called Collection Games. They gather every Tuesday via AymoLive and read two poems on a previously given theme. Each week they welcome a special guest, another poet, who collects others' thoughts and creates a poem during the stream. Once again, art is crafted in the moment and that poem is the only trace of the game. We’ve been making connections and working on projects with various artists and art organizations from around the world…poetry and open mic events live from NYC, live performances from the Netherlands, Egypt, Canada, Germany, Portugal, Spain, backyard festivals from Glasgow. Most recently we’ve partnered with Sofia Underground – International Performance Art Festival held in person in Sofia, Bulgaria. A festival which takes place over 5 days, where 30+ artists from 10+ countries will present their work. We are extremely honored that for the first time since it was founded in 1997 the festival will be broadcasted live to the rest of the world via AymoLive.

HT: In which direction is AymoLive going? Are you keeping things fully digital?

AymoLive: AymoLive was initially envisioned to be fully digital, however, the concept has evolved as a result of the feedback we’ve received from artists and fans who the platform is here to serve. Today we see it as a mix of digital only performances, as well as in-person performances which are streamed. Our team is meeting and communicating with emerging artists from various parts of the world to see how AymoLive can solve the obstacles faced by young, emerging independent artists. For example, two themes that are common globally amongst emerging artists are lack of venues to perform and exhibit their work and limited, often local, audience reach. So, for those artists who would like to host a hybrid event (in-person but streamed) we've worked to help them find suitable venues, as well as provided additional organizational and technical support. Furthermore, we work together with artists to promote the event providing them access to a wider, global audience. Our goal is not a total digitalization of live cultural and artistic events; rather to make the best of advancements in technology and complement in person events, with the purpose of making art and culture more accessible and connected.

Faruk Mehić - Composition Ranging from Piano Works, Chamber Music, Choir to String Orchestra**; August 26, 2022**

HT: How and when has music started being the form of communication with the world?

Mehić: It all started 11 years ago when I started going to Elementary music school in Bihać. From then on, music has been a big part of my life. I started with practicing accordion, then some first experiments with composition and improvisation. How the time passed, it gradually evolved from some curiosity into lifestyle. Now my day cannot pass without composing, playing, listening or analyzing music. You become devoted to the music and you have constant urge to explore more in order to become better artist, in my case a better composer.

HT: Could you tell us about your journey as a composer?

Mehić: My journey with composition is a very long and interesting story. The first experiments with compositions happened at the very start of the musical education. Those compositions were at a low craft level, something that was obvious to me. So, I decided that I will spend time analyzing music and until I feel that I have enough knowledge about it, I will start with proper composing. That lasted about 10 years (and after that for a very long time) I was able to write composition which was fairly decent. With that in mind, I decided to enroll at the Academy of Arts in Banja Luka, at the Composition Department in the class of professor Tatjana Milošević Mijanović, PhD. I am very glad and lucky to have her as a professor (and all other professors and teaching assistants, because I have learned so much in the span of one year, and it's amazing but at same time a bit unbelievable. The way of composing has always varied, for now I collect and write down ideas. After a while, I choose those ideas, sketch out a plan, i.e. the skeleton of the composition, and start composing. Basically, if all the elements are good, then composing goes very smoothly. For the last couple of months, I have started to use folklore motifs in combination with various compositional techniques. Also, I like the polyphony and polyphonic technique, it was one of the first compositional techniques that I have learned (it was used by great composers such as J. S. Bach, G. P. da Palestrina, Orlande de Lassus and many others). Because I also love poetry, I like to write compositions for choir or lead. I have used various poets from Dobriša Cesarić, Mehmedalija Mak Dizdar, Safvet beg Bašagić, Branko Ćopić, Musa Ćazim Ćatić and also the texts of contemporaries like Ajla Osmanović, Milkica Marjanović and Ajdin Muftić (although those compositions are yet to be performed). That's one little overview of my compositional journey.

HT: Who or what is your biggest inspiration when it comes to creating music works?

Mehić: Like many composers, I found inspiration in everything but mainly in nature, everyday life, history, art (mostly poetry). I can also say that my hometown Bihać gives me great inspiration; whether it's looking at the beautiful stunning river Una or visiting some important historical places in the town.

HT: Your composition *Suite per pianoforte op. 21 no. 1* has been recorded in Hong Kong by the renowned pianist Serene Yu. Please tell our readers more about this international collaboration.

Mehić: Me and Serene Yu have met through messages and it's my first international collaboration. For the first international collaboration I'm thrilled. I see that she performs a lot as a soloist and in chamber ensembles. She is a very communicative and accommodating person to work with, fulfills all her promises and does a really great

job. It was interesting to get to know her culture and the way of life in Hong Kong. She is an excellent pianist and organist, I can say that it is a great honor for me to have met her and worked on this project with her, and I hope for some new projects as well.

HT: Any plans for the future you would like to share with us?

Mehić: Well, I hope I am going to find performers for my compositions. In these past few months, I have composed various pieces ranging from piano works, chamber music, choir compositions and even composition for string orchestra. I worked very hard on these compositions and I hope they would be premiered.

Secondary Archive - History of Central and Eastern European Art from Female Artists' Perspective**; November 22, 2022**

Iga Maria Szczepańska is a Manager at the Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation and Dejan Vasić is a Visual Arts Program Curator in the Center for Cultural Decontamination in Serbia.

In the following interview, they will share with us details about their collaboration and how SECONDARY ARCHIVE supports the rising and established artists of Central and Eastern Europe.

HT: First things first, tell us about the project of Secondary Archive, and its position at this year's Manifesta.

Iga: Secondaryarchive.org is a digital, constantly expanding archive that presents the history of Central and Eastern European art from the perspective of its female artists. This year, the Secondary Archive was enlarged with artists from Ukraine and Belarus in February and most recently 144 artists from Albania, Kosovo and Serbia, as well as creatives from the four founding Visegrad countries also joined the platform. Therefore, making it one of the most prolific and important archives of the region. We were very pleased to be able to move beyond the digital sphere this year and participate in the Manifesta 14 Biennale in Pristina, Kosovo. The installation prepared by the Secondary Archive team and its partners at the National Gallery Kosovo showcased the voices of nearly 160 artists, who are a part of the platform. It has marked a new path for the project, that so far has had more virtual frame. For the unique sound and visual installation in Manifesta 14, each artist recorded a one-minute statement, ranging from statements in active voice, political and artistic manifestos, to experimental sounds, wordplay, or sound poetry. The project did not have a curator per say, in order to give the platform to the artists themselves. Statements were also played randomly through a specially designed program in order to avoid further hierarchization.

Dejan: In the frame of Manifesta 14, we also have launched an Open call for emerging artists. This call was open to early career artists from Albania, Kosovo, Serbia and V4 Countries, who were born after 30. December 1987. We have received over 250 applications, out of which we have selected 5 artists from Albania: Lori Lako, Elsamina Musiq, Marina Sula, Abi Shehu, Gerta Xhaferaj, 3 artists from Kosovo: Laureta Hajrullahu, Agrina Vllasaliu, Barbara Prenka, 8 artists from Serbia: Sanja Anđelković, Marianna Feher Nikolić, Aleksandra Saša Jeremić, Jelena Mijić, Sunčica Pasuljević Kandić, Anastasija Pavić, Anja Tončić, Adrienn Ujhazi, and 8 artists from V4 countries:

Eliška Konečná (CZ), Stonytellers (CZ), Lili Agg (HU), Zsuzsanna Simon (HU), Michalina Bigaj (PL), Justyna Górowska (PL), Alicja Wysocka (PL), Paula Malinowska (SK). All of them together with curators have written their statements that are now part of the archive. The international jury of Adela Demetja, Renea Begolli, Daniela Šiandorová, Róna Kopeczky, Bogna Stefańska, Lucia Kvočáková, and myself, decided to award Elsamina Musiq (AL), Laureta Hajrullahu (XK), Sanja Anđelković (Serbia) and Paula Malinowska (SK). The announcement of the grant recipients was part of the official launch of the newest artists' statements in the Secondary archive in the frame of the closing of Manifesta 14. Besides providing a space for the celebration of female voices, also opened a space for discussing the struggles of women and female artists in the different countries that are part of the archive.

HT: Dejan, you are an active participant at the Center for Cultural Decontamination in Serbia, and through Secondary Archive, you are fulfilling your plans and goals on empowering art and cultural activities in the Western Balkans art scene. Am I correct? How would you describe your role and activities?

Dejan: I am working as Visual Arts Program Curator in the Center for Cultural Decontamination (CZKD), where I organize exhibitions, public discussions and programs in different formats. CZKD Center is a non-profit cultural institution established in 1994, whose work promotes critical discourse, alternative trends in social and cultural policy, human rights and fundamental freedoms while confronting violence, nationalism and discrimination. It is a place of culture and arts, open to political and cultural dialogue, and a space of criticism and affirmation. Since its foundation, CZKD organized several thousand events: plays, performances, exhibitions, public discussions, film screenings, concerts, workshops, seminars, conferences and lectures, as well as several complex performance experiments. We are promoting emancipatory practices, creative initiatives, and the culture of resistance by opening a space for dialog and exchange of knowledge and experience beyond Serbian and the borders of former Yugoslavia. The Visual Arts Program of CZKD opens a space for exhibiting, discussing and introducing the different artistic practices from the post-Yugoslav region, with the aim of recognizing and promoting different political, media and education paradigms, as well as sustaining and intensifying the international context of those practices and their wider and deeper historical contexts. By the same token, my commitment as a curator of the Visual arts program is to provide continuous support for experiments in art, based on the approach of mediation and exposition, as a collective negotiation of fostering unexpected knowledge. Within the Secondary archive, together with my colleagues Mirjana Dragosavljević, Simona Ognjanović and Jelena Vesić, I have edited and helped in writing 40 artists' statements and texts during 2022, that gave significant insight into practice, everyday life and politics of female artists. These statements written in first person and active voice also help in understanding shifts of the visual arts paradigm in the longue durée art histories of the Yugoslav Art Space (1945-1991) and Serbia (1991 to present).

HT: Iga, please tell us about Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation and its role in the Balkan Peninsula cultural scene. Share with us your experience with Secondary Archive.

Iga: The Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation (Instagram) was established by Katarzyna Kozyra in 2012 in Warsaw. The main goal of the organization is to support artists and women working in culture from Eastern and Central Europe. For 10 years we have been fighting invisible barriers and questioning social norms that legitimize the low representation of women in art. Since the establishment of the Foundation, we have organized a number of projects, exhibitions and publications, and our flagship initiative is the Secondary Archive, a digital archive of female artists from the region of Central and

Eastern Europe, which currently includes almost 500 female artists from Albania, Belarus, Czech Republic, Kosovo, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine and Hungary. With the most recent enlargement in the Western Balkans, we hope to continue our collaboration with the partners – Center for Cultural Decontamination in Serbia, Tirana Art Lab Center for Contemporary Art in Albania and Oral History Initiative in Kosovo, beyond the recent project. The Secondary Archive unites institutions across Eastern and Central Europe, establishing a strong network leading to collaborations, exhibitions, publications and more. We hope to keep inviting more artists from the Western Balkans to join the platform, as well as to organize additional events. The first one, happening very soon, is the exhibition of the Secondary Archive in Belgrade. It is marking just the beginning of what is to come.

HT: So, you are planning the second exhibition sometime in December? Share with our audience more information, including when and where can they visit the exhibition.

Dejan: We are speaking about two exhibitions. First is the solo exhibition of Sanja Anđelković, an artist who received the grant on the Open call, and it would be open for the public in period 06.12-11.12.2022. The second exhibition would take place in CZKD Center in the frame of our Visual Arts Program and it would last from 27. December 2022, until 15. January 2023. In this exhibition, we would present the sound peace which was produced for Manifesta 14, and organize public talks and discussions together with the artists.

Iga: With the recent launch of the Secondary Archive and the success of Manifesta 14, after which we received very positive feedback, we understood that there is a need for such initiatives in the region. Dejan Vasić from the Center for Cultural Decontamination came up with the proposal to tour the exhibition and show it next at the CZKD in Belgrade, Serbia. The exhibition will take place in December of this year and will be a great closing to such a fruitful year for the Secondary Archive, as well as the teaser for the projects coming in 2023.

Farah Noor Cemer – Design Is My Structure Which I Can Nourish and Explore Creatively**;**

April 17, 2023

HT: Project Karim Zaimović implemented by Museum of Literature & Performing Arts in BiH serves to remind future generations about atrocities of war, and artist's lives affected by it. Could you share with us more information about this project?

Cemer: This project was started by Ifeta Lihić who has for 2 years worked on forming the collection of works by Karim Zaimović. She has been the one with the initiative and knew how important it is to have his works displayed and available for next generations. The project is made up of several components. The first is the purchase and formation of the collection, then archiving and digitization, and finally the exhibition. For those who may have not heard about Karim Zaimović, he was a short story and comic book author, literary and music critic, journalist and prominent figure in Sarajevo's cultural scene, particularly during the siege (1992-1995). His exceptional talent provided a brief refuge from the harsh reality of war and humanized human existence throughout the challenging war years. His young life was tragically ended on August 13th, 1995, as a result of wounding. He was one of the war's last civilian casualties. Karim is one of the first post-modern writers in Bosnia and introducing him to the younger generations I see as a great contribution to the cultural scene in Bosnia. We have planned a multimedia

exhibition which will include the wide variety of his works and interests. It is important to say that we are working on a tight budget. The project is fully supported by external donors. We know that people are looking forward to this exhibition and we have received so much positive feedback on the project. This does motivate us to continue working and making this exhibition that will represent Karim and his works in the best way possible.

HT: What is your assignment in this project?

Cemer: My main job on this project has been the visual identity of the exhibition. Besides helping and assisting as much as I can on the project, my focus is on the creation of the exhibition's identity, translating Karim's wide world of interests into one exhibition and finding that one thing that glues all of it together. I am responsible for everything from the posters, catalogs, exhibitions print…everything a multimedia exhibition would require. Sort of being the middleman between Karim and the visitors who will see the exhibition. I was welcomed by Ifeta who leads the project with open arms, and she has given me much freedom in the creative process which has been super challenging and also out of my comfort zone, but I have enjoyed the process very much so far. I am looking forward to seeing the results, after we've been working hard on making this exhibition a new experience for the visitors.

HT: Has the overall process of this exhibition affected you in any way?

Cemer: Yes! It's been a rollercoaster of emotions really. Karim's book was something that came to me very spontaneously, about 7 years ago. I read it in one take, and was mesmerized. I could not find one single thing about these people mentioned in the book, yet it all seemed so real to me. It was like a treasure hunt I have been on all these years. I have to mention that I did work on a project during my bachelors that was an experimental take on Karim's book *The Secret of Raspberry Jam*. So, long before this project I did my own in-depth research about him and mostly his book. Having the opportunity to tap more into this world he has created through his other works that we have been going through and preparing for the exhibition has just been very special to me. It has also been very hard to set boundaries between what is ok and how far I can take my interpretations. This person is very much alive within the people who knew him and I always remind myself of this. I want to translate the world he has created from words to something more visual and touchable. I really hope that this exhibition will bring more young people to discover this extraordinary person, read his book, and hopefully be inspired.

HT: How did you start your journey as a visual artist?

Cemer: It's a cliché to say I've always done art. It's true, but it was never something I thought I would do in life. It was a thing I did and it was fun. I was sort of good at it, so I continued practicing. Later on, I started to discover different media, I painted, made jewelry and started sewing. There was a period of time when I was very obsessed with street art and graffiti. I was fortunate enough to continue my education in Norway where I had the opportunity to choose my classes very early on in my education. I remember taking a "design & redesign" class in junior high. Here, I was introduced to many materials. It was also my first introduction to clay, which happened to be something I became very fond of later on in life. I have been practicing pottery for 3 years now, and it has been a joy. Clay is a very fun material to work with. There are endless ways to experiment with different colors, glazes, tools... And the best part is, you can recycle clay as many times as you want. This is perfect for me as it gives me enough space for failure. I can fail and try again, until I am satisfied with the results. I can go from an idea in my head to sketching it on paper, then have a full standing raw product in less than an hour. Pottery is also a slow process, so it helps me practice patience, and understand that good things require time. A very crucial point in life was also my high school, because it led me to everything else I accomplished later. I went to

design school where I had great teachers, great classmates and space to learn and practice. It was here I realized that design is what I want to do and everything else would be a wrong path. Everything I learned there helped me a lot when I applied to arts academies both in Norway and Croatia. Of course, during my time in Split I learned a ton of things, which I am implementing today in all of my work. I don't think there was a start to the journey, the journey and experiences I had over years was what led me to trust myself more and continue to practice.

HT: As a graphic designer educated in Split, you have knowledge about art scene in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Norway. Please share with us your thoughts about art scenes on these territories. What are similarities or differences?

Cemer: All of these places carry their own style. I would assume people think of one as better than the other. I would not agree. I see them all as equals, but with different specialties. Norway is a relatively young country; many traditions are carried on through mythology and fairytales. It is extremely interesting to learn and experience a whole different world than one I knew before I moved here. On the other hand, I can speak mainly about design as it is my expertise. Scandinavian design has been the blueprint for many years. You can draw a parallel between this and Yugoslavian industrial design that has gone unnoticed in the design world at that time or was not given as much attention as it should've, but still holds a fantastic quality in both aesthetic and functionality. Many of these products are still very much in use, both in interior and graphic design. What I see as an issue in the Balkans is that people very often look further away for something good, when they in fact have so much great just where they are. After saying this I can so to say call myself a hypocrite. After 3 years in high school where I learned and practiced Scandinavian design, I realized that in order to learn more and become better, I needed to see what was "at the other end of the stick" so I moved south. I thought, okay minimalistic design is great and it works, but try designing a logo that will stand out in hundreds of blinking signs on your neighboring building anywhere in the Balkans. That takes good practice. By all means, that does not mean the design and art scene in Croatia or Bosnia is bad, it is just not seen as equally important in the environment we share. The space for it is very narrowed, but design has been slowly getting its credits and now being seen as a more important part of the space and environment we live in. It is a crucial communication tool, and it's everywhere and I really hope people will start to recognize how helpful good design can be in their day-to-day life. The main difference between Norway, Bosnia and Croatia is the space and resources given towards the visual artist and designers. The quality of work is unquestionable; there are great artists everywhere. Norway only provides enough space to present these works. Croatia too has given the creative world bigger platforms than the ones I see in Bosnia, but I see young artists there taking charge and creating their own space. I have met and worked with people from Croatia and Bosnia that create things that are so cool! I keep thinking, if more people knew how many awesome artists live in this part of the world, they would be creating the next blueprint!

HT: As you are currently resigning in Norway, please share with us your connection with Balkan cultural scene - many of your works are focused on it.

Cemer: I have been torn between the North and South for the majority of my life. The questions of identity always follow me, and the sense of belonging to one place has been lost a longtime ago. I have just recently learned to see this as a benefit rather than something bad. I love the contrasts of culture I live in and the perspectives I gained from it. I love the Balkans; it is forever my inspiration. My works have been mostly connected to the Balkans, because my network expanded more and led me to different projects and people while studying in Croatia. I am a big fan of history and the Balkans is a place where history was made over and over again. The culture there is something so unique.

It's like this folklore being passed on to new generations and is a part of every single person who has their roots there. If we just take our time to nourish this, I think it can be a great source of inspiration. Being from this special place on Earth is forever something I will be proud of.

HT: What are your career plans when it comes to your graphic design expertise and creative outputs?

Cemer: I finished my bachelor's degree in visual communication design last year at the Arts Academy in Split. I decided to "gift" myself a very needed year off after a lot of hard work. I wanted to give myself time to try things I have seen and work more on projects I wanted before deciding what path to continue on. Lately, I have been tapping into the film world. I had a great opportunity to work with and learn from great young people at the Film Center Sarajevo for two months and I have been very inspired and motivated by the great work they do. I always loved film, and would love to explore more towards that direction, from creation to postproduction. I have also been dedicating more of my time to pottery, and after 3 years of practice I am now designing what I hope to be my first collection of product design that I am planning to put out in the early summer. I have been "the Jack of all trades" my whole life. It was something I was very insecure about before, but I think it has given me such a fresh view on things. Design is my structure in life. It is one place that I know I will always love to do and enjoy. It is a place that is so wide and fun that you always have something new to learn, see, and do, but is again structured and defined. It is my main focus, but I will forever want to explore and nourish my curiosity with new knowledge. One thing I am sure of is I want to continue my education at some point, maybe and hopefully in a new country. It's scary and challenging to move to a new place but you get so much in return later on. At the end of the day, I would just love to have the opportunity to do what I love. Good things always come out of love.

Dušan Sabo – Memory Tends to Be Selective and Some of the Authors Are Clearing Their Consciousness**; May 2, 2023**

The book *Sarajevo, those days...* is a published manuscript of the diary that the author, Dušan Sabo, journaled in the period between the end of 1991 and the middle of 1993, while staying and surviving in besieged Sarajevo. Thirty years after the events described in it, this diary represents a valuable existentialist document about the life of an individual in a time marked by ideologies of collectivity, the same ones that condition political life in the countries of the Western Balkans to this day, shaping the fate of all who try to live in this climate.

HT: Your collection of diary entries from the period of the siege under the title *Sarajevo, those days... (Diary 1991-1993)* was successfully published this year by Foundation EKIPA. As there are many literary works that cover Sarajevo siege, could you tell us what makes your perspective unique on this matter?

Sabo: I have read several diaries written during the siege and which, with their descriptions, serve as testimonies. What happened before the eyes of their authors was

simply like that. The truths in them can be abused by subsequent interpretations, but they cannot be changed. Here, I am thinking especially of *Diary from Pale 1992*, by a friend and journalist Mladen Vuksanović. However, when numerous war memoirs (let's call them retro diaries), based on incomplete notes, began to be published, it became clear to me that memory tends to be selective and that some of their authors, each for their own reason, are clearing consciousness. I did not write the diary because of the testimony. I was aware that each of us in Sarajevo could testify to the same. My motive was and remains extremely personal, intellectually perhaps pretentious. As an oppositionist in both the communist and nationalist order, it was necessary for me to recognize, based on the very modest data that reached us, the citizens under siege: what is happening tectonically, as an invisible process of stirring war and politics, and which of their social shapes will determine our future destiny. I wondered what would remain as the truth about everything, when all the blood gets washed off the clothes and the asphalt. Therefore, my daily records, raw and unprocessed as they were written, do not contribute much to collective memory as they stop the collective oblivion. You understand the nuance: I was interested in observations that today many would sink into collective amnesia. So, if they do not remember, let them not forget.

HT: Diary entries were being written up until your travel to Paris in 1993, where you stayed. The diary entries were being kept from the public eye for 30 years, so what led you to publish them?

Sabo: Diary entries started a few years before the war. Their purpose was to temporarily put aside all my doubts and unconvincing ideas in art, until one day, or maybe never, I unravel it. In this, "involuntarily, but secretly" (this is a Croatian oxymoron coined by me), helped me immensely a fictitious interlocutor: Miroslav Krleža. He was neither to the liking of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (especially before it came to power), nor to the nationalists after its collapse (when they came to power and still occupy it). With Krleža, that epoch-making giant of a writer and intellectual, I did not share the greatness, but I did share a common destiny: the social environment always valued critical intelligence, but never followed it. What I want to say is that my diary was created under the star sign "publish post mortem". Publication of the Diary today, began His Majesty the Occasion. Matija Bošnjak, the editor "responsible" for its public disclosure, then a young man in professional maturity, was crossed by unpredictable paths. Let's not forget that there is an age difference of two generations between Matija and me. The war chased him to safety when he was at an age for Spielhozen (eng. rompers). And when we got close enough, I showed him my several manuscripts, of which only a few dozen were the typed pages of the Diary. The rest belongs to the passage of time, the birth of the publishing house Fondacija EKIPA. The most honest answer to your question about the motives that led me to publish Diary is: I was led to do so by its current editor, Matija Bošnjak. And let me continue rhetorically with honesty: isn't it fantastic that a manuscript, from the darkness of a drawer, is recognized by someone from the younger generation as something so valuable that they bring it out into the light of the day?

HT: You are a writer and a director, with decades of experience from essays and dramas and academic papers to film and theatre directing. When it comes to Sarajevo siege, why not write a drama, or develop it further into a play?

Sabo: In the middle of '93, I was in France, and I noticed that there is no lack of sympathy with the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but that understanding is not exactly complete in everything. I devoted the entire first year of my stay to sensitizing the public opinion, starting from participation in public forums, through a theater performance in Grenoble (*Conquest of life*) to happening in Chambéry (*Waiting for the beginning,*

waiting for the end). Then I returned to my basic profession in the field of directing and acting pedagogy. I also published a textbook for directing (*Le traité de mise en scène*). Then I had a doubt that most of the authors from the disintegrated Yugoslavia would do what the foreign public expected of them: to thematically cover the war. I made a firm decision not to become a war profiteer, an eternal victim of war in art and the art of a victim in war. My artistic prism is irony poisoned through humor and satire. I started to go beyond the existing genres and found myself once again in complete misunderstanding. Prejudices and expectations have always influenced the decisions of publishers, film producers and theater directors. If you experienced and survived the war, why are you interested in the intellectualization of vaudeville? You walked in blood and now you're writing a novel about people who, with full imagination, pronounce grammatically perfect nonsense in a Parisian setting? No war in all this? So, you understand: careers and jobs are made on war. Bid today on a manuscript about an ex-cop who suddenly returns home to find the mailman drinking soda with his wife. None of the young playwrights and theater directors who have graduated from "war schools" will notice that this is a comedy about a sadist who pathologically constructs a false accusation of fraud against his wife just so he can live out his frustrated dictatorial urges on someone innocent. Personally, I don't complain about anything, because I understand everything. I have always lived under the guillotine of the epoch over my head. Fortunately, the masters have, by now, only lubricated it.

HT: Research project *Brothers Serbs, What Happened?* was published in 2014, and discusses the motives behind the origin and development of nationalisms in the Balkans, with a special focus on Serbian nationalism. The book is a personal search for answers to the questions of why an ordinary person, a member of a certain nation, feels like a victim because he shares the fate of his nation. Could you tell us a bit about the search process itself? When did it start, and how did you decide when the search ends and gets formatted into a book?

Sabo: My family, both wider and narrower, experienced all the major tragedies of the 20th century. From war divisions to imprisonment and concentration camps. From great-grandmothers of Swabians, Hungarians, Serbians, Slovaks, through Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, and even some sects, everyone laughed more easily than cried. Humor dominates my upbringing. My mother was born from a Serbian family, my father from a Hungarian family. He would define Serbs and Hungarians as follows: you recognize a Serb by the fact that wherever he goes, he declares it his. Unlike the Hungarian who, however far as he gets, claims that it was already his. I state this only to draw your attention to my innate tendency towards national and religious demythologizing. To that extent, the rise of Serbian nationalism in the 80s of the last century irritated my stomach. This balderdash of historically altered and even falsified data, based on the heroism of decasyllabic poetry and imbued with propaganda that sees phantom enemies everywhere, had to result in war. The majority of the Serbian people fell into that hellish spiral, not seeing that excessive glorification of their own history leads to blindness for the entire current environment. Having found myself in front of such historical autism, based on self-conceit and other people's "dangerous" apparitions, I decided to publicly oppose it, pointing out that it is not innate, but acquired through political training. That I succeeded in this is shown by the fact that no one publicly attacked me, not even "snipers" from the solid media core of the Serbian Nazi phalanx. They assessed the risk of my persuasive answer as real. And how much they are in touch with the official authorities can be seen from the fact that bookstores did not order the book under the excuse that the suppliers "did not recommend it".

HT: For the last question, I would like to ask you to share your advice for the up-and-coming artists in the Balkans. How much do they need the Balkan history, or maybe does the Balkan need the art from them?

Sabo: In my dictionary, the meaning of the term advice implies more the meaning of an attempt. If we assume that the attempts are correctable according to the results (action - reaction), the advice seems binding to me, as the sum of some ready-made, concentrated experience. In the place of the young people, I would ask myself: am I more of a Balkanian European, or a European Balkanian? Thus, the same path, for artists, is passable in both directions. The most important thing for me was not to end up spiritually as a Balkanian Balkanian. Because, as much as the Balkans is part of the Europe, the Europe is the Balkans capital.

AKSA & Vilen - Visionaries of the NastyGrooves Production**; June 18, 2024**

NastyGrooves Production was founded by AKSA and Vilen with the aim to promote domestic artists. After nine produced releases, they are ready to move on to different levels. Check out in this interview about the plans that NastyGrooves has for their audience.

HT: How did AKSA and Vilen start their business partnership? When did you meet, or made an arrangement on your music production ideas?

AKSA: How did it all start? Well, I'd like to know too (laugh). As far as I remember, during that time, both of us were marking our first releases, and somehow, you could say we randomly got in touch. We started talking more often, sending each other new materials to listen to, and we worked on 2 releases where I did remixes for Vilen. One of those releases on Monofonik Records did really well; it got a lot of plays and ranked well on the top 100 charts. Soon after that, I started NastyGrooves Records, and considering everything mentioned and the potential I saw in Vilena, it seemed natural that Vilen would be the other half of the label.

Vilen: A friend once shared an AKSA track with me, and I was really impressed. It got me thinking about reaching out to a producer from my home country. That initial thought led me to connect with them and explore potential collaboration opportunities.

HT: What's the biggest satisfaction in your work?

AKSA: For me personally, the greatest satisfaction in this business, if we're talking purely about music releases and production, is the moment I present my music to the audience. I think there's no better feeling than receiving positive feedback on your own production because behind it all are hours and hours of work, and such recognition for that effort surely brings immense satisfaction. Now that I'm also a label owner, I have the privilege to present and promote other artists' productions, and I feel equally happy when a track from another producer released on NastyGrooves receives positive feedback as if it were my own. As for DJing, the greatest reward is actually the gigs themselves. Being able to play music on massive sound systems for an audience is priceless, and I'm thrilled that I've had the opportunity to experience that joy in my life.

Vilen: My greatest satisfaction comes when I achieve a breakthrough in my skills and music writing after I’ve hit a creative wall and burned out from making music. After struggling for weeks to finish a track or come up with a new idea, I step away from it all

for days or even weeks. Then, out of nowhere, inspiration strikes, and I create a track in one sitting, while also leveling up my production skills.

HT: If NastyGrooves Production could collaborate with any historical Balkan figure, who would it be and why?

AKSA: Interesting question. Although there are many people who have left a significant mark and contributed to the development of electronic music in our region throughout history, and it would truly be an honor to work with them, we are more focused on new talents. We've noticed that there's an expectation in our region that someone will give you their place, that everything will be handed to you on a silver platter, but that's not how it works. Many great talents are lost waiting. One of the main ideas of our record label is to promote new talents in this scene. For example, on a recent compilation released by our label, we have several local producers making their debut releases. Who knows, maybe on NastyGrooves we'll discover a new Adi Lukovac, Marko Nastic, or similar talent.

HT: What's the craziest backstage moment you experienced?

AKSA: There were really many moments, but the first one that comes to mind is the first NastyGrooves party at Trezor club. Everything was great, we were hanging out and joking around, all hyped up for the first event until we realized that we actually didn't have any DJ equipment. There was a misunderstanding because the club thought we would bring our own equipment, while we thought the club would provide it. Luckily, the staff at Trezor resolved the issue by fetching their own equipment, and the party went ahead with a slight delay.

Vilen: I like to keep those memories for myself and people present at the time.

HT: Have you been producing tracks lately, and with whom? Are you going international with your collaborations?

AKSA: As I mentioned earlier, we are actively engaged in production, and on behalf of both myself and Vilen, I can say that we have prioritized production over DJing. Regarding international collaborations, we have already released music with global record labels and collaborated with international DJs and producers for both productions and performances at parties. Regarding NastyGrooves Records, we've had one international artist so far, and soon you can expect two EPs from producers who are not from our region. We won't disclose too many details at this time, but I can reveal that one of them is a renowned figure in the progressive sound scene worldwide. We recommend following us on social media to be the first to hear when the time comes.

Vilen: Lately, during my usual burnout phase, I haven't been able to produce good quality music. However, when I do succeed, the tracks turn out really well. I'm also excited to share that I've managed to secure a remix collaboration with two prominent international producers. While it's still in the early stages, I can't reveal their names just yet.

HT: What are your plans for the future? Can we expect events any time soon?

AKSA: Our future plans include continuing our dedicated work and releasing music from both ourselves and artists we believe showcase quality. In terms of events, we'll be hosting the NastyGrooves Records Showcase at Club Trezor, promoting a recent compilation from our label. The event is scheduled for July 5th, and we encourage everyone in Sarajevo not to miss out. The lineup for the night includes DJs 2odd, Six Beats, and myself, AKSA. It's important to note that the party will emulate the renowned Boiler Room style, with the DJ booth placed in the center of the club. Additionally, stay tuned for details about our upcoming open-air party in collaboration with intersection.ba and NN nights, which we'll announce soon on our social media channels.

Vilen: In the future, I plan to shift my production style towards blending electronic and live music. I aim to incorporate more live playing instead of solely relying on Ableton.

HT: Can you give us link so we can follow you online, or if someone wants to contact you?

AKSA: You can follow NastyGrooves on all social media platforms and music sales and streaming platforms, and you can find all the links at https://linktr.ee/nastygrooves. Also, if you are involved in music production and believe your music fits the concept of NastyGrooves Records, you can send your demo materials to nastygrooves.demo@gmail.com.

Sara Tiro and Emina Skrijelj - To Be a Woman Is to Perform**; October 3, 2024**

Sara Tiro and Emina Skrijelj received a grant funded by the European Union and the Goethe-Institut for literary research on the topic “To be a woman is to perform”, and spent the last 11 days in Amsterdam at the Atria kennisinstituut voor emancipatie en vrouwengeschiedenis, where they researched this gender-oriented topic in detail.

HT: What inspired you to choose the topic "To be a woman is to perform," and what questions did you aim to address in your research?

Sara: We noticed that every woman around us acts differently based on the group of people she is talking to. Not to mention that everything a woman does gets criticized, therefore she needs to be careful, put on a mask to avoid such comments. She needs to “perform”. We aimed to address why are women always nitpicked? Why can’t they just be themselves? Why does every accomplishment need to be so hard to achieve? Why do they have to choose when to be feminine and when to be masculine?

HT: Can you elaborate on the specific literature or case studies you found in Amsterdam?

Emina: We found a book called *Rebel women* written by Rosalind Miles. The book is about women who paved the way in order for us to have it easier. For example, there was this one chapter about women in science, our first thought was “why aren’t these women more famous?” and upon finishing the chapter our second thought was “performance became second nature to these women”. Since they were scientists in the 19th and 20th century, they had to find loopholes in order to learn and explore. They realized that they can’t just be scientist like men were. They had to be mothers, wives and scientists, or have a man who supported their ambitions. Some even dressed like men to be taken seriously. Some were denied education despite being highly intelligent. None of them had a chance to avoid fulfilling the role society expected from them. As humans we all know it all comes down to money. These women were not financially stable and were forced to do it all.

HT: Performance is an art of movement, so how did you shape the meaning of ‘performance’ in you essays?

Sara: Upon reading about women’s lives and their passions we discovered that for us, performance is not just stepping on the stage singing, dancing or acting, it is all of the above and much more. Women need to grow into the role of being a woman, which has certain standards and expectations. They never stop performing, whether we are 5, 16, 25 or 65 we all put on the lipstick in the same way our mothers taught us. In the

same sense we act in the world. In our essays we wrote about women performing for themselves, the men, the public. It was the way Marilyn talked and looked at people that made everybody swoon. It is the way women made art (sewing dresses, painting, writing novels, etc.) that made other women feel inspired. It is the way they protested that set our standards so high. And the way they learned, fought through life, broke stereotypes that inspired us to look at performance through a different lens.

HT: What were some of the most surprising insights or challenges you encountered?

Emina: Since the topic is so wide, the biggest challenge was where to begin and when to stop. We could've stayed at Atria for a month straight since we were so inspired by the lives these women led. The beginning was the hardest, so we chose to start with our favorite girl and the woman who had the performance of a lifetime, Marilyn Monroe. The most surprising insight was how hard it was being a woman at the time, but at the same time how beautiful it was and is being a woman. The hard part was being housebound, not being able to work, how much is our existence reduced to being a mother, how much we still have to fight. But the beauty part… after looking through *The Gracious* magazine, we realized that more than a 100 years ago these women were just like us. They liked fashion and make-up. We noticed that sisterhood always existed and that is why women persevered for so long.

HT: How did your experiences in Amsterdam inform your perspective on women's status in society, both historically and contemporary?

Sara: We realized that even though a lot of the things are not the same as they were 70 years ago, most of it is still there more than a 100 years later. We know that women had no right to vote, to get an education or to earn a living but they also had to fill in the shoes that were waiting for them at the doorstep as soon as they are born. Now, in most countries, women can do all the things they couldn't before, we gained our basic rights. But the shoes we are expected to fill are still waiting at our doorstep and we need to put them on anytime we leave the house. The expectation of being a perfect housewife did not change. Nor did the ads whose main target are women. We are still being advertised beauty products by exploiting our insecurities. We saw this in the *Companion* magazine that was issued in 1955. Commercials like "To get smoother skin use this cream" or "Having issues with annoying frizz? Try this shampoo" are the same in 1955 and 2024. It seems like society still thinks that women only care about their looks, and they push the narrative that we should care about our looks that much.

HT: What activities or interactions during your stay in Amsterdam had the most impact on your research, and why?

Emina: One of our walks through Amsterdam actually inspired one of the essays. Walking through the Red District we came to a conclusion that the women behind the window shops were the ultimate performers. They were strictly told and thought to put on a show. It didn't matter what time of the day it was, they were there, calling and seducing strangers in order to "conclude business". We got curious and did a little bit of research on the history of prostitution, and later came to a conclusion that nothing changed in that profession, ever. Another thing that impacted us was the fact that most of the people on the street were not interested customers, but tourists. The women are being put behind the glass door to perform for us as if we are in the circus. And that is what inspired the essay "Prostitution, crime or satisfaction?"

Find the publication "To be a woman is to perform" on the official website of ATRIA as well as academia.edu.

Achilleas Ntentis – Play of Sensation, Memory and Material**; June 21, 2025**

Achilleas Ntentis plays with boundaries between sensation, memory, and materials. His art begins with a feeling, an internal landscape shaped by fragments of memory, and deeply personal yet universal emotions.

HT: Do shapes speak to you when you begin a new piece? At which point do fragile parts of identity arise? Or does it all get formed as a part of one structured vision?

Ntentis: When I begin a new piece, it's not so much that shapes "speak" to me, but rather the sensations and emotions that certain images evoke. I work more through memory and the feeling it carries, rather than following a logical or structured approach. The fragile parts of identity don't appear right away — they emerge organically as the work develops. Often, they are small details I might not consciously recognize at first. These elements act as vessels of personal memory, while also contributing to a broader narrative of how identity can be both fragile and constructed, both personal and collective.

HT: What role does the Greek landscape or culture play in your use of color?

Ntentis: Greek culture doesn't appear directly in my work through recognizable symbols or patterns. However, it's been inscribed in my sensory system and resurfaces through my use of color. I believe my relationship to Greek culture is experiential — it's connected to how I live, exist, remember images, textures, colors; and for that reason, it returns in a quiet, subconscious way. These elements function more as emotional traces than as literal references. At times, my colors seem to carry the silent presence of those lived experiences.

HT: Is there a moment in your process when the artwork starts to resemble memory, rather than the other way around?

Ntentis: I think I begin from that place — before anything is painted, there's already a sensation. Sometimes, even a beautifully empty canvas can feel like memory… if that makes sense. It carries a quiet tension between what was and what could be. So, the work doesn't gradually become memory — it already starts as one.

HT: How has your relationship with visual form evolved over the years of creating?

Ntentis: I think I have shifted quite a bit towards this over the years. Now I can say that when I create a work, I am more interested in communicating than in painting — a communication with a wound that is often absent, or even doesn't exist, but I absorb it. I think I used to be more literal in the way I created before. I'm beginning to embrace my emotions and let them become the driving force of my work.

HT: Do colors, each one, start symbolizing certain fragment of your identity, and do the shapes have the same effect? In addition, how does the collective identity settle in your artwork?

Ntentis: Certainly, from the absolute whites of a silent surface to the colors of a sunset filled with all kinds of fantasy hues, these elements represent fragments and facets of a continuous search — a search for questions, for identities, and for understanding what is being sought. Personal experience and identity, when expressed through art and shared within a social context, inevitably connect to collective memory. This collective memory acts as a repository of shared stories, feelings, and cultural narratives that extend beyond the individual. In my work, personal moments — like me playing with a ball in 2005 — serve not only as individual experiences but also as entry

points to the collective consciousness. Through these personal fragments, the work communicates with and activates collective memories, creating a dialogue between the self and society.

HT: What's something you've learned about yourself through your practice?

Ntentis: That I'm starting to trust my emotions more. That I still can't stand working in the mornings. And that I shouldn't take myself too seriously — no one's watching, and if they are, that's actually a good thing.

HT: How do you know when a work is finished, and do you ever change your mind?

Ntentis: When I feel I have nothing more to say or add to the work. Usually, no, I don't change my mind — what's done is done. That's the fun part.

Dinara Pavlović - Honest Conversation with Something Deeper Within Ourselves**; June 21, 2025**

Multidisciplinary artist Dinara Pavlović invites us into a world where art is not a choice but a necessity, a language her body and inner silence speak fluently. Pavlović uncovers, listens, and responds, often in solitude, often in motion.

HT: What inner need drives you to express yourself through multiple forms of art instead of just one?

Pavlović: I don't choose multiple forms of art on purpose: it's more like they choose me, depending on what I need to express. Some feelings or ideas are too big, too raw, or too layered to fit into just one form. Sometimes a movement says what words can't. Sometimes an image captures a silence that performance can't hold. It's almost like each medium lets me access a different part of myself. I follow where the emotion or intuition takes me, and it rarely leads to just one path. Expressing myself this way feels more honest, more whole.

HT: When you begin a new work, do you feel more like you're discovering something from within or creating a completely new world?

Pavlović: When I start something new, it usually feels like I'm discovering something that was already inside me. Almost like I'm uncovering pieces of an idea that were just waiting to be found. It's not always fully formed, but there's usually a feeling or a spark that I recognize, like, "Oh, this is what I've been trying to say or explore." But as I keep going, it does start to feel like I'm building something new around that discovery, giving it a shape, creating a world for it to live in. So, it's a bit of both: it begins with something internal, something I'm digging out, and then it turns into something new that I'm shaping as I go.

HT: How do your body, your thoughts shape the different mediums you work with painting, video, and performance?

Pavlović: My body and my thoughts are where everything starts. They shape how I feel the world and how I respond to it through art. In performance, I use my body like a voice when words aren't enough. Every movement comes from something real: tension, joy, memory, pain. In video, my thoughts take over more looping, layering, creating little worlds where time feels different. Painting is where I slow down. It's more

intimate, like listening to myself in silence. Each medium lets me speak in a different way, depending on what's alive in me at that moment in my body and in my mind.

HT: What meaning does your art hold in silence or solitude?

Pavlović: In silence or when I'm alone, my art feels the most real. There's no pressure to explain, no one to perform for: just me, my thoughts, and whatever's trying to come through. That quiet space lets things rise to the surface that I might ignore in the noise of everyday life. Sometimes it's emotions I didn't know I was carrying, or questions I've been avoiding. When I paint, move, or film in those moments, it's like I'm having a conversation with something deeper inside me. It's not about making something perfect, it's about being honest. Silence strips everything down, and that's where I find the heart of what I want to say.

HT: Do you believe that art can ever fully capture experience you are aiming to share?

Pavlović: For me, art never quite captures the full experience I'm trying to share. When I go through something, it's a mix of emotions, thoughts, and tiny details that don't always fit neatly into a painting, a poem, or a song. There's always something left unsaid or unseen. But I've also found that art doesn't need to show everything to matter. Sometimes, if I can just share a feeling or a small moment that resonates with someone else (even if it's not the whole story), that connection feels real and enough. It's like saying "I've been here. I've felt this" and knowing someone else understands, even just a little. So yeah, art can't fully capture my experience, but when it gets close enough to touch someone else's heart, that's what makes it so special to me.

HT: How do time and memory influence the way you choose to work across painting, video, and performance?

Pavlović: Well, time and memory aren't just ideas, they're part of how I live and create. My memories carry feelings and moments that I sometimes can't even put into words, but they find their way into my work. When I paint, it's like I'm peeling back layers of my own past, slowly uncovering what's been tucked away. It's a quiet, almost meditative process. With video, I'm drawn to how time moves, how moments flow, repeat, or slip away. It feels like I'm capturing pieces of life as they happen, but also how those moments echo in my mind afterward. Performance is something else entirely. It's raw and immediate. The memory is alive in the moment, shifting with every breath and interaction. It's the closest I get to sharing something truly real and fleeting, something that exists only between me and the people watching.

HT: What questions do you hope your art will always be asking?

Pavlović: I hope my art always asks the kind of questions that make people pause and feel something real, like: "What's going on beneath the surface here?" "Why does this moment matter?" "How do we hold onto hope even when things feel messy or hard?" "What parts of ourselves are we afraid to show?" For me, art is about connection between people, feelings, and stories. So, I hope my work keeps asking questions that invite others to explore their own feelings and maybe see the world a little differently, even if just for a moment.

Iva Milanović – Powerful Truth in Motion**; June 24, 2025**

In this conversation, Iva reflects on the challenges and promises of working within a regional scene, the artists that shaped her, and the evolving narratives she hopes to embody.

Her answers reveal not just an artist, but someone deeply engaged with her craft, the world around her, and the countless lives still waiting to be lived through performance.

HT: How do you navigate the shift between the immediacy of the stage and the intimacy of the camera?

Milanović: I would say that I shift easily. I enjoy the variety between those two. Even though I enjoy intimacy of the camera much more, I enjoy the details and feel more comfortable in front of the camera, I also enjoy theater very much. You can work on your tools much better and more frequently, being present in that moment excites me, makes me compete with myself and enjoy the exchange with others, beautiful moments happen in the theater.

HT: Contemporary performance art is constantly evolving. In what ways do you see theatre and film responding to today's social settings?

Milanović: I don't know. But I hope that it's gonna be opposite of the current reality of my country and the world right now.

HT: What unique challenges or opportunities does regional scene offer?

Milanović: Better question is what opportunities does it give despite the challenges. Unique and brave artists, creative minds and authentic talents.

HT: Is there a particular moment or role that you consider a turning point in your artistic journey?

Milanović: If I had to choose a moment it would be the day that I got into the Academy, everything after that was a domino effect. In that logic, everything started way before that, and I can't wait to see where will it take me.

HT: Who were the artists, local or international, that first made you believe this was your path?

Milanović: I didn't have a role model growing up, or someone I looked up to professionally, I just followed myself, I felt I belonged in this profession since I was little and I'm grateful that the universe agrees. But I had reminders along the way, as I had doubts as artists do, that this is my path. People like Jug Djordjevic, Milos Lolic and Nikola Zavisic, and many of my other colleagues that I worked with, were the people who helped me articulate my taste and language.

HT: How do you see the role of women in contemporary performance evolving?

Milanović: I don't know but I like to imagine that there will be roles with more meat and complexity. I'm sure that it will.

HT: What draws you most to a role, is it the complexity of the character, the message?

Milanović: Probably the complexity first, I'm really interested in the logic of the character and people generally. Everybody does something for a reason. I like being a detective and connecting the dots. But I'm always focused on the story and the bigger picture. How is the character functional in the story, why is he here and what does he contribute.

HT: What do you believe gives a performance an amount of power and emotional weight?

Milanović: It depends on the character, story... but the truth, the truth is always powerful. Truth can have many forms and genres but it will always make a path for someone to understand and sympathize.

HT: What is your core motivation to continue your art work?

Milanović: The truth, logic, play, freedom and irrational. I would love to understand and live as many lives as I can.

Kenan Mujagić – Sculpting Memory, Shaping Loss**; July 3, 2025**

Kenan Mujagić is a sculptor whose work captures the images of war and memory through expressive forms. Originally drawn to painting, he found his voice in sculpture during his academic years, eventually embracing the medium's physicality and unpredictability. His pieces, often skeletal and wounded, evoke anonymous histories and personal reflections. Working primarily with clay and plaster, Mujagić explores themes of death, faith, and forgotten lives. In this interview, he speaks about his creative process, material struggles, and the silent weight carried by each sculpture.

HT: When did you first realize that sculpture was your medium of expression?

Mujagić: When I was younger, fresh into high school, I remember being disappointed that I ended up in sculpting class. I initially wished to become a painter or illustrator (for books primarily). Since I mostly used pencils and pens as a kid/teenager, I was still unfamiliar with sculpting as a medium - so at the beginning it felt very exhausting. As if I was gimping myself with a medium that wasn't tailored for me. I would say that my appreciation and understanding for sculpting only started to blossom early into college. After being very pleased with several portraits that I did in the first year. I received seemingly genuine responses from the academy, so I eventually got comfortable with it.

HT: Can you describe the feeling you get when you begin shaping a new piece?

Mujagić: It's hard to explain as the emotion is like unwrapping a new gift. Which is mainly why I never enjoyed sketching sculptures on paper. In previous years, most of my attempts were based on paper sketches, this resulted in me measuring too often - and made my sculptures look too rigid as a result. Nowadays, I start by sculpting the general shape. In sculpting, it is always a mistake to prematurely do the details, so it's important to "spin around" the clay mass until you find your wanted shape. Usually, I like to squint so I could blur the inconsistent texture. And I continue to model with squinting eyes until the general shape starts forming into a silhouette of someone or something that I have on my mind. I do this several times, sometimes with longer breaks as I work on different sculptures - as I often don't have an idea on how to continue a work.

HT: How do you choose your materials?

Mujagić: By what's available. I always wanted to cast sculptures, either in bronze or iron - but due to financial constraints I essentially settled with clay and plaster. With that said, I find clay and plaster to be "superior" choices for many sculptors (although for orders this is not true). As it gives me the freedom to aim for a sculpture that's big and detailed - without it emptying my wallet. With plaster, I'm able to imitate materials (with acrylics and graphite mostly, as they too are affordable). And generally, clay gives me a very "organic" texture that I can't replicate with most other materials.

HT: Which part of the sculpting process do you find most meditative, and which most challenging?

Mujagić: I don't like to waste time in sculpting, or in any other medium. I understand why art is considered by many as "meditative" - but I never considered it as

such. I do get absorbed into my work though, where eight hours can feel like two hours. Sculpting is very physical work - so there is a lot of reward in being a sculptor assuming one enjoys feeling drained physically (this most likely distances me from emotion, as I'm too absorbed by the process). Sketching in clay is quite interesting for me as I'm able to experiment. I do not like being "frozen" and indecisive - as it's usually a dead end. Should you "close" the texture and form of a sculpture, you risk losing that "flow" - as it becomes obsolete to make any drastic changes, so if you end up not liking a sculpture it's best to just finish it as is and move onto the next. I generally find sculpting most challenging when I'm uncertain when to/how to wrap things up. Sculptures can lose a lot of "freshness" as you continue working on them - so it's not uncommon for a sculpture to "drop" in quality over time. It's moments when something about the face annoys me, that's not only challenging to face (as it's often a subtle mistake) but also frustrating.

HT: Do you plan your sculptures in detail, or do you let the form emerge?

Mujagić: I do use paper sketches and references (if I'm modelling an individual). Alongside some anatomy sketches (if the pose is too taxing mentally). But generally, I'm not someone that plans every step in detail. However, I remember once losing an entire portrait because I made its construction too weak (initially I didn't plan for the sculpture to have such a big head, but as time went on, I began to realize that I made the back of the head too small). Ever since that accident (what was essentially three weeks of work lost), I made sure to not gloss over the construction part. But after that's done, I'm free to make whatever changes I want, without much direction or planning (if my eye thinks it's wrong, it most likely is). It can become nauseating when the construction gets in the way though, but never unsolvable.

HT: How important is location or environment in your practice?

Mujagić: Bosnians generally like to be loud, and it can become distracting while sculpting or doing any sort of medium. I was never one to socialize, but my classmates would often turn the classroom into a "café spot". Generally, I didn't mind it too much but I always preferred being alone in the quiet while working on anything. So, I ended up building a habit in which I would arrive earlier to class. However, once I was finished and pleased with my sculptures, I would loosen up again and only arrive at the atelier when absolutely needed. So, to answer the question - it's very important, and it affects the work in many ways. Especially for sculpting, which requires a lot of empty space.

HT: How do you know when a sculpture is finished?

Mujagić: I wish I knew. When I was in third grade of college, a professor told me to do an expressionist/impressionist sculpture. Which at first, I considered to be fairly easy, but progressively got harder. The entire "schtick" of expressionism/impressionism is for it to retain the "freshness" of the shape and texture, while looking finished in execution. These are difficult elements to balance out - and made me appreciate it more as a style of expression. Whereas in classical art, I found it much more relaxing - as I didn't have to worry too much about such problems. However - I think generally in all mediums, all artists have this issue where they don't know when to stop.

HT: Is there a piece you've made that you can call your favorite?

Mujagić: I would say that the piece I'm most fond of would probably be the portrait of Borojević, that or the soldier's head in the mud. I've changed styles in the past - so it's hard to say if I'll change my opinion in the distant future (most likely that I will).

HT: What role does memory play in your work, if any?

Mujagić: In my latest works, I did not use any references. I was sculpting World War One soldiers, and I figured since photo-documentation was still on the weaker side during WW1 - that it would've been more interesting to sculpt them from "memory". So, I'd give them faces that I thought lived through the war, anonymous ones without names or stories.

HT: Do you see your sculptures as standalone objects, or as part of a broader narrative or world?

Mujagić: It's hard to say, since I don't believe art is as strong as people claim it to be. Most of my works as of late were focusing on the grotesque nature of war, which I think was done to death as a topic. However I felt like leaning into this nature, I was "inspired" in that sense by most memoirs and photographs of that era. In that sense, I see it as more of the same, what we've already seen, a miniscule part of this world.

HT: Do you think sculpture still holds a powerful place in today's fast-moving visual culture?

Mujagić: I personally consider poetry and literature to have a stronger impact on any country and culture - when comparing it to most visual arts. Generally, sculpture is considered a "lower art" (alongside with architecture), due to gravity and limitations, such as materials - its expenses and transport. I think that sculpture has lost a lot of influence as of late. Granted that some of the most popular examples and achievements of societies that we have, are still riddled with strong examples of sculptures and buildings. I think time will tell if we've hit a "dead-end" in art as a collective.

HT: Is there a recurring shape, gesture, or theme in your work that you return to? Why?

Mujagić: Most of my sculpted faces and bodies are on the skinnier side, I enjoy defining the more interesting parts of the body, boney parts such as the shoulder blades or collarbone. Even to the point where it would be anatomically wrong - as if I tore a chunk of their flesh out. I also enjoy sculpting hollow eyes (as seen on Borojević), as it has a certain charm to it. Besides that, a recurring theme would be death, through the wounds and expressions I sculpt.

HT: Who are the sculptors, living or dead, you find yourself constantly learning from?

Mujagić: Socialist sculptures were always eye catching. Specifically, the *Minsk Relief* by Andrey Bembel, and the portraits of soldiers by Arno Breker. Outside those examples, my favorite artist would most likely be Vanja Radauš - specifically his sculpture of Franjo Krezma. Certain portraits made by Marino Marini are also interesting to see, as they lack detail - yet you could perfectly well imagine the details on them. In general, there are too many to choose from, and it seems I have a broad taste. But these are the "top five" that have influenced me as a sculptor. And for that reason alone, they are also the ones I studied from the most.

HT: Do you consider your practice political, spiritual, personal — or something else entirely?

Mujagić: I consider all things "political", even if it tries not to be. But as for my sculptures, I consider them to be personal, despite the fact that most of the sculptors are based on anonymous soldiers - I feel a connection with the past. There is a certain level of spiritually as well - as I genuinely believe in the greater good, in Christ. I romanticize frequently about the past; something drives me to believe it was better. Austro-Hungarian in general felt like a monarchy worth protecting, when we were all under God not divided by modern politics. Where Bosniak meant being a citizen of Bosnia, and today the term Bosniak has been perverted by modern politics.

HT: Have you ever created a piece that was too emotionally difficult to finish or show?

Mujagić: I've drawn plenty of works which I do not show - as I consider it to be more of a personal possession, maybe because I don't consider it to be of fine quality. I mostly have this sentiment with my poetry - as it's mostly a way to document interesting ideas. But generally speaking, I have never had a problem with showing any piece I've

made, even if it's leaning more to the personal side. But some sculptures did prove to be difficult to finish, and even to this day I'm not satisfied with the final result.

HT: If someone unfamiliar with sculpture asked what your work is about, what would you say in one sentence?

Mujagić: It's about the loss of life, soulless statistics of war.

HT: What advice would you give a young artist who wants to turn raw material into something meaningful?

Mujagić: I'd instruct them to pursue something else, as I doubt there's a meaningful economy for artists here. But for those persistent, my general advice would be to measure frequently and observe through as many angles as possible. Never slow down while modeling/sculpting (regardless of material) and to remain vigorous. Constantly look for fixes, never let emotions deceive you and your results.

HT: When painting, what compels you to pick up the brush, is it a mood, an idea, or something more instinctive?

Mujagić: It's the same with writing (be it short stories, ideas or poetry) or sculpting. There is this sudden moment in which I feel to document something in that exact medium. If it's a heavy feeling in my chest, it's through words. For painting, I usually feel like doing self-portraits in a style I haven't tried before. Usually switching techniques as I go. I've done plenty of works inspired by Max Beckmann, I'd create on this feeling too, from visual poetry to illustrated scenes (anything that would've popped into my thoughts as I'd read, *The Hollow Men* by T.S. Elliot stands as some of the more memorable). I've also felt like doing plenty of illustrations from scenes I've read that impacted me. Fauvism, impressionism and expressionism are the ones that have inspired me the most to paint.

HT: How does color function in your work: is it symbolic, emotional, or purely intuitive?

Mujagić: Purely intuitive, there's a lot of debate on what color is and represents. I believe that color can be whatever you want it to be, as it seems to be decided by cultural factors. I've always had a love for dark purple and pine green. The most inspiring colors to me would most likely be seen on Francis Bacon's paintings. I enjoy transforming paintings with a bright yellow, and I frequently use an inverted color perspective. I draw frequently with pastels.

HT: Do you approach the blank canvas with a clear vision, or do you allow the painting to evolve as you go?

Mujagić: I usually do a quick sketch, and then I work on the things I don't like about the drawing as I go. I believe there's a certain moment where a piece turns from unremarkable to good.

HT: In an age of digital imagery and fast media, what do you believe painting can still offer that other forms can't?

Mujagić: Yes. It's a documentation of our muscles and emotions - something nothing will be able to replicate (yet). I personally am not the biggest fan of digital art or 3D (virtual) modelling. As there's a disconnect between the user and the material. However - as of recently I've started to dabble in 3D modelling myself (and found some success in it, I've picked it up just a week ago). So, I've found 3D-modelling to be more relaxing than sculpting with real materials (as I'm no longer restrained with expenses).

HT: Is there a painting you've made that changed the way you think about your own work or about yourself?

Mujagić: One day I'd finish a painting, be pleased, then another day I'd look at it and refuse to show it to anyone. I felt this numerous times through any medium - I learn through every piece, so it's important that I understand what I want from future work.

Irena Kovač – Non-Linear Time Where Past and Present Intertwine**; July 14, 2025**

Irena Kovač is a visual artist whose practice centers around collage, exploring themes of memory, time, and transformation through layered photographic and painterly compositions. With a background in both digital and analog techniques, her work merges fragments of personal and collective history into non-linear, emotionally resonant visual narratives. Deeply intuitive in process, Kovač draws inspiration from music, literature, and cinema, often blurring the lines between documentation and dreamlike introspection. Her art invites viewers to reflect on the invisible threads between past and present, beauty and discomfort, identity and change.

HT: In what ways do you explore the relationship between memory and time in your collage practice? How does the concept of time manifest in your work?

Kovač: In my collage practice, I investigate the relation between memory and time by building visual narratives. I use fragments of black-and-white photographs that reflect past - personal, collective, symbolic and position them within vibrant, dynamic, contemporary spaces. Through this approach, I create an atmosphere where time becomes non-linear, and layers of past and present intertwine, collide, and enrich each other. Time manifests in my work primarily through aesthetic and photographic choices. For me, time is subjective, closely linked to my inner experience at the moment of creation.

HT: Is your art a way to respond to or resist definitives of life? If you believe there are any definitives?

Kovač: I believe that everything is energy, and that our purpose is to gather experiences. From this viewpoint, I don't think we are here to provide ultimate answers or resist anything. My artworks reflect moments of unconscious awakening, uncovering buried memories that have shaped and transformed me over time.

HT: How does the passage of time change your relationship with a finished piece?

Kovač: For me, time acts as a psychoanalyst. After spending some time reflecting upon my own works and series, I begin to understand why certain elements appeared, and what challenges or experiences I needed to process through them.

HT: What is your process like, spontaneous or carefully structured? Do you see your art as a form of documentation or transformation?

Kovač: My process is largely intuitive. While extensive planning is rare, an initial vision typically guides an entire series. It usually begins with a single piece, inspired and partially visualized through a photograph, color, texture, or something else that sparks my imagination. I browse online archives of black-and-white photographs, as well as family albums, selecting images that I feel can be manipulated or given a new context. Occasionally, I prefer spontaneous actions, but most often, I enjoy meticulously constructing each step. I see my work as a documented transformation.

HT: How do you explore emotional polarities, such as beauty and decay, in your visual language? Can beauty and discomfort co-exist in one image?

Kovač: The human body frequently appears in my work, through which I highlight beauty while embracing the natural changes and transformations that occur

over time. Although I have not yet fully immersed myself in this motif, I sense it will become significant in future work. Beauty and discomfort can absolutely coexist in the same image. What is beautiful is not necessarily comfortable.

HT: Why collage? What drew you to this medium initially?

Kovač: My interest in collage began with a university assignment on the theme of homage. While researching artists, I discovered Ronald B. Kitaj's painting *The Ohio Gang*, which visually resembled a collage to me. I selected this painting and a few others by Kitaj because they deeply resonated with me. Although they were technically paintings, collage felt like the right technique for the assignment. That was my first serious engagement with collage, and I quickly realized photomontage suited my sensibility perfectly. It felt effective, playful, and exciting. This led me to continuously experiment and delve deeper into the medium.

HT: Do you work with analog collage, digital, or a combination of both?

Kovač: From the outset, I have used both digital and analog collage techniques. I frequently source images from online archives, apply digital manipulations, print the images, and work manually with them. Nowadays, I often begin by creating a digital sketch and then use it as a reference to create the analog collage.

HT: What other art forms, such as film, literature, music, influence your visual practice?

Kovač: All forms of art influence me, but music most significantly. It often dictates my color palette, particularly when I don't have a fixed scheme. I listen to diverse music often 1970s and 1980s psychedelic rock, surf, ambient, disco, funk, soul, reggae, dub, jazz, electronic, as well as contemporary bands and artists. My musical taste is eclectic. I frequently envision my collages as sequences from imaginary films, which makes moving images a powerful emotional and color-based influence in my practice. I'm especially drawn to comedy series, documentaries, and films based on true stories. Regarding literature, I mostly engage with psychological and spiritual themes, which tend to inform the motifs and atmospheric qualities of my work.

HT: How has your style evolved over time, and what triggered those shifts? Is there a particular art form or medium you wish to experiment with next?

Kovač: Since 2012, my style has evolved significantly, particularly through transferring principles of classical collage into oil and acrylic paintings. This transition led to simplification, focusing on fewer elements per piece and emphasizing figures and their dialogues. Changes in my themes and personal interests naturally led to shifts in expression. In terms of future experimentation, I'm interested in exploring art that uses ecological materials. While I've begun researching this area, I'm particularly eager to delve into sculpture or spatial installations, which I believe would enrich and complete the visual narrative I pursue.

HT: Does feminism explicitly show in your work, or does it intertwine more subtly? Are there feminist or activist artists who you incline to more?

Kovač: My art is not explicitly feminist, though it can be interpreted through that lens, as the female figure is prominently featured. As a woman, feminist issues are important to me, but my intention is to preserve the essence of femininity. Women and men should have equal rights, yet our differences and sensitivities are equally valuable and worth nurturing. Conceptually, I haven't heavily drawn on feminist artists, but if I had to highlight one, it would be Hannah Höch, the German Dada artist.

HT: In what ways does your identity shape your aesthetic decisions? And do you believe that art has the power to change people?

Kovač: My identity profoundly influences the aesthetics of my work. I believe art is intrinsically personal and evolves as artists themselves evolve. By nurturing our unique identities, our artistic expressions become more distinctive and recognizable. I

strongly believe art has transformative power. If I didn't, I likely wouldn't be an artist. Everything, even subtle details, affect and change us. Everything we encounter, seen or unseen, generates subtle vibrations that raise or lower our consciousness.

HT: How do you balance beauty and critique in your visual storytelling?

Kovač: I do not deliberately strive for balance between beauty and critique; rather, I allow expression to flow naturally during creation. However, similar to speech, I consider the delivery of critique is crucial. It must not harm or offend but rather inspire positive change. Perhaps this consideration subconsciously affects my visual narratives.

Alen Šimić – Distinctive Approach that Blends Intuition, Music, and Imagery**; July 21, 2025**

Alen Šimić is a theatre and film director whose work navigates themes of existentialism, pain, and human psychology. With a distinctive approach that blends intuition, music, and imagery, Šimić challenges audience to engage with questions rather than provide easy answers. Known for his sharp comedic touch as well as his dedication to authentic storytelling, he offers a candid reflection on creativity, society, and the evolving landscape of contemporary art. In this interview, he shares insights into his artistic process, inspirations, and thoughts on the current state of film and theatre.

HT: For years you've been active in theatre and film, and you keep creating original pieces. What inspires you to keep moving and creating?

Šimić: Hunger and boredom; hunger is not metaphorical but literal, one must live off of something. Boredom, because it "pushes" me to think about how to approach the topic.

HT: When you direct, are you more interested in creating answers or posing questions?

Šimić: It's more about asking the question. I don't think I can give answers to myself, let alone to the audience.

HT: When you begin a new project, do you start from image, idea, text?

Šimić: Mostly it's a combination of things (image, thought, text), although if I would need to single out one element as the most influential, that would be music.

HT: Do you balance structure with the chaos of creativity and intuition?

Šimić: I'm trying, with more or less success. Although, it all depends on the point in the process, at the beginning I'm more open to chaos, and in general, I rely more on intuition than on logic/calculation/thought.

HT: You have directed a comedy series which has a big audience, and successfully portrays some caricatures. Does comedy show human core better than tragedy or other genres?

Šimić: I think the answer to this question is a big 'yes', though I wouldn't know how to explain the reason. I could offer some generalizations, but I think the best example is that silent films by Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, or Harold Lloyd are "understood" on all continents and in all languages.

HT: Does your work seek to reflect the world, critique it, or escape from it altogether?

Šimić: All three of the mentioned things, although perhaps what I do the least is criticizing the world.

HT: Some of your works are motivated by war and post-war themes, existentialism, and survival in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Do you feel there's a unique artistic language that emerges from BiH?

Šimić: I think these themes are unavoidable, but they never can or should be, the central theme of a film, novel, or any other work of art. After all, these very concepts carry different meanings and interpretations in every individual work, whether it's a film, theater, or some other medium. So, I believe that by accepting to deal with such themes, we push ourselves into the space of generalization. I think the audience feels sick to the point of throwing up when they read somewhere that a film deals with a "post-transitional society" (or some other theme written in "project jargon"). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as is probably the case everywhere, the vast majority of things fall into the drawer of a homogeneous expression, dealing with subjects "while wearing gloves." The motivation behind that is perhaps the desire to make things more accessible and simplified for the majority of potential consumers. As in other environments, there are individuals here who try to do things in their own way. Maybe I'm exaggerating, but in my opinion, there are too few of those.

HT: Do you feel a responsibility to reflect social realities in your work?

Šimić: No.

HT: Play *A Hunger Artist*, adaption of Franz Kafka's short story, was well accepted by the public. What do you think audiences are truly seeking from storytelling in contemporary theatre?

Šimić: I'll assume they're looking for things that interest them, or for texts and topics they haven't had the chance to encounter before. I think the topics themselves aren't as important as the approach to them, the audience responds more to the style, that is, the way someone approaches a topic, than to the topic itself.

HT: Žižek claims that cinema reveals the unconscious structures. Do you view your work as revealing hidden truths?

Šimić: I think it would be pretentious to say that I do, but I hope that's the case.

HT: Of all the projects you've directed, is there one that feels closest to your heart? Why?

Šimić: Short documentary *B4*. Because it's the only film that wasn't approved beforehand by any committee or board, but something where I worked completely the way I wanted to.

HT: Have you discovered a visual or thematic motif that recurs in your work?

Šimić: Noise and escape from it.

HT: Would you say you prefer to show pain or pleasure in film and theatre?

Šimić: Pain, pain, pain, pain, pain…

HT: Are you working on any new projects at the moment? Would you like to share something about them?

Šimić: I am supposed to direct a short fiction film in September, working title "Who to Summon When There's No Inspiration?" and a play at the Sarajevo National Theatre, an adaptation of Agatha Christie's novel *Murder on the Orient Express*.

HT: Were you ever a fan of Marvel or DC Universe, comics or films? Would you ever direct a play or a film based on their stories?

Šimić: Tim Burton's *Batman* was my first favorite film, so I can say I'm a fan of the movies, and later, when I had access to the comics, I became a fan of those as well. I prefer DC comics over Marvel's, though Marvel's cinematic universe is far more successful and better. I recently watched James Gunn's *Superman* and really liked it because it was the first time in a long time that I saw a superhero movie that doesn't

take itself too seriously and stays true to the adapted material rather than trying to imitate a “realistic” film in the style of Christopher Nolan. Of course, I would love to direct an official film adaptation of Marvel or DC comics or from other publishers like Image or Dark Horse Comics. I don’t see why not, but I also don’t see why anyone would call me to do it.

HT: Lately, there is a rise of comedy series which aesthetically and through storyline work around rich people on luxurious travels whose relationships are more of a caricature of wanna-be have-it-all, than real relationships. One of the examples is *White Lotus*. Have you watched any of these series? What do you think of them?

Šimić: I’ve watched several series and films with similar plots like *Knives Out* and *The Menu*, which have similar storylines and treat the “metaphor” and “message” in the same way, Rich = Bad, Poor = Good. Things are pretty black and white, so everything is more or less the same. My conclusion is that it’s all boring because, with that setup it’s impossible to say anything new on the subject. I think the current real-life situation offers crazier narratives about the debauch and lack of empathy of the rich than Hollywood can or wants to imagine.

HT: Have you watched the *Barbie* (2023) movie? Any thoughts on feminism in the film industry?

Šimić: I watched the movie and quite liked it, it's better than *Oppenheimer*, and about feminism in the film industry, I don’t think.

HT: What would you change in Quentin Tarantino’s movies?

Šimić: I would shorten almost every one by 10 minutes.

HT: Would you ever direct a cooking show?

Šimić: Gladly would, especially if it’s something like 24 Kitchen that involves traveling to various locations.

HT: Artificial intelligence is on the rise; do you think it is creating an impact on the film industry?

Šimić: What I’ve noticed is that even when it’s used, the results are bad. I don’t mean in intention or “morally bad” but they are making generically poor example of what it’s supposed to create. For example, AI-generated posters for Civil War. Allegedly, they used AI in the film *Brutalist* to improve Adrien Brody’s Hungarian pronunciation or accent, but that film is a bunch of Zionist propaganda crap, so I can disregard it.

HT: Have you used artificial intelligence in your work, ever?

Šimić: Not directly in my work, but I can say it has helped me with many small things and allowed me to do quickly what would otherwise require several people or several days.

HT: Would you ever direct a script or a drama, knowing it was generated by artificial intelligence tools?

Šimić: If it’s the best script I’ve ever read, of course I would.

HT: What’s the first image that comes to your mind when you read a script, and does that image survive to the final cut?

Šimić: Usually, it’s the other way around: first comes the “image,” “mood,” “atmosphere,” “scene,” or something similar, and then the script is written according to that. Unfortunately, that initial spark often doesn’t survive in the final version of the script or play text.

HT: Who's your favorite director/directress, and why?

Šimić: Lars von Trier, because his career is a continuous search for new ways to make films, while still staying within what defines him as an author.

HT: Can you tell me about the first film you ever made?

Šimić: A film adaptation of a scene from William Shakespeare's *Othello*, which was set on a film set as a student exercise where students adapt the scene from *Othello*. In short, desperate.

HT: What's a moment in your career that you're especially proud of?

Šimić: None. Pride is a deadly sin.

HT: Have you ever thought about leaving directing, and why?

Šimić: Every day at least once, and there are a million of reasons.

HT: What do you do when you lack inspiration?

Šimić: I try not to force violently the "inspiration."

HT: If there is one particular aesthetic choice you would decide to follow for the rest of your life, which one would it be?

Šimić: Long takes or shot sequence.

HT: What advice would you give to an up-and-coming artist?

Šimić: To learn to be silent.

Katarina Nikolić: On Poetry, Pain, and the Persistence of Sunflowers**; August 15, 2025**

From the gallery walls of Opovo's Jovan Popović Gallery, which she directs, to the quiet solitude of her poetic voice, Nikolić navigates themes of loss, resistance, and transformation with fierce honesty. In this conversation, she shares the personal and political undercurrents behind her writing, the role of visual art in her literary practice, and why embracing stillness, like sunflowers at dusk, can be a radical act.

HT: *Stop When Sunflowers Sleep*, what does it symbolize, and how did it come to represent the heart of your collection?

Nikolić: *Stop When Sunflowers Sleep* became the leitmotif of the collection. I wrote the poems in the form of a diary — they were my comfort. They allowed me to be angry, to be sad, to fully feel — they embraced my pain. And at the end of the day, much like sunflowers, they reminded me of the natural cycle of change, and of how necessary it is to slow down when life demands stillness.

HT: What themes or emotions did you find yourself returning to most often while writing this poetry collection?

Nikolić: When I began writing these poems, I wasn't writing with the intention to publish them — I wrote because I needed to. The first cycle is filled with nocturnes, full of questions without expecting answers. Perhaps I didn't want to hear the truth. Then came the second cycle, marked first by physical pain, then emotional pain, which forced me to live in the moment and find joy. Although I often jokingly call this cycle "my bloody poems," in reality, it's about coming to terms with and accepting what's happening. These poems may be a little frightening, but they are true — and that was important to me. When that cycle ended, I felt — for the first time — that something inside me had cracked… I became a sunflower. The third cycle was more thoughtful and socially engaged, and it became clear that the playwright within had awakened. It was time to organize everything I had worked on for a year and share my experience with others.

HT: How does this book differ from your previous work in prose and drama, both in form and in emotional tone?

Nikolić: My plays are socially engaged, and the screenplays I've written span over various genres. I have written everything from noir thrillers to illustrated fairy tales. My background in dramaturgy has given me a broader context for development. Although the approaches and writing processes differ, they all reflect aspects of my creative path. Over the past two years, I realized I want to bring all these roles together and experiment. It's fascinating to combine drama and poetry, screenplay and prose. I'm certainly not the first to do this — many have come before me. Bergman wrote prose-like screenplays, and Fosse writes plays that are pure poetry. Embracing my own experiences as the most meaningful starting point has helped me connect more deeply with what I write. *Stop When Sunflowers Sleep* is exactly what that has brought me.

HT: Was there a particular poem in the collection that felt especially personal or difficult to write?

Nikolić: There was one poem in the collection that felt especially personal — the one about my mother. All the poems are written in the first person, and I tried to avoid specifying gender, even though it is quite clear. My friend Nina Peleš, who helped me with editing, suggested that I read the poems aloud during the editorial process. She would read first, then I would read. Sometimes, she asked me to read a poem multiple times until every line found its proper place and duration, as if we were listening to music. We listened to the words as if they were melodies. At one point, she told me to put the poem into the feminine voice and address it directly to my mother. I did, and we both cried. The last verse of the collection says: "Wipe away the tears that never fell / Let the stuffed birds / Fly from the deepest wounds." Forgive your parents, forgive yourself. Life goes on.

HT: Could you describe your creative process for this collection?

Nikolić: I started writing a poetry diary. Soon I realized something was happening—something I hadn't experienced in quite that way before. I had written poems before, but they were prose poems, more considered and deliberate. These poems were raw and stripped down. My friends either cried when they heard them or didn't want to hear them at all. I understood them. I wrote everywhere: in bed, at work, on the bus, in the park, on my phone, on paper, even on my hand. They were born from blood, from deep inside. When I reached the last poem, I knew it was the end. My friends asked for more, but there was nothing left. During the editing process, I insisted on no censorship... no radical stylistic changes... just the words and their music.

HT: You've written across genres, from plays to novels to poetry. How do you decide which form a story or idea should take?

Nikolić: It's mostly a rational decision, one that comes from experience. When a topic or event catches my interest, I immediately know whether it will become a play, a screenplay, or a novel—unless it's a commissioned project. I'm able to visualize the story clearly, independent of the genre, and I follow that feeling. Interestingly, my novel *The Hunting Ground* was originally a screenplay for a short film. It obsessed me. Then I dedicated three years to writing the novel. Right now, I'm working on the screenplay for the series *The Hunting Ground*. What a full circle.

HT: Has cultural landscape of Pančevo shaped your work?

Nikolić: Although I never truly lived in Pančevo, I spent my teenage years there — at the high school, the cinema, the library, the Cultural Center, and by the river. I have wonderful memories, amazing friends, and inspiring teachers from that time. The people of Pančevo have accepted me as one of their own, and I'm grateful for that. I dedicated my novel *You Are Not You* to that experience and to the city itself.

HT: Has the current sociopolitical climate in Serbia influenced your recent work, particularly your poetry?

Nikolić: Yes, absolutely. Looking back at the whole process, I have been writing and will continue to write about themes that explore emotional emptiness, digital alienation, and the fragile boundaries of intimacy. These auditory elements intensify the tension between inner vulnerability and external societal pressures, culminating in a quiet yet devastating act of self-destruction. The latest cycle of poems is called *Stray Dogs*. In a playful way, it reflects all of us. The cycle began when I wrote a few words and posted a poem on Instagram. Each poem would usually start with something like, "Hey, you stray dogs…" Then, some people would respond and send me their own versions of replies, which encouraged me to continue. It was both sad and funny at the same time.

HT: As director of the Jovan Popović Gallery, how has curating visual and performative art influenced your literary practice?

Nikolić: I've been managing the Jovan Popović Gallery since 2017. That role has introduced me to artists and practices from across different disciplines, and allowed me to engage with exhibition production, museum work, publishing, catalog writing, and critical texts. The gallery was founded in 1970, and we've worked hard to preserve what our predecessors built while continuing to move forward. In today's world—especially in the context of global crisis—cultural institutions must adapt to new technologies and invest more carefully in cultivating their audiences. These are ongoing challenges. Working in the gallery has deeply shaped my growth and has become a continuous source of inspiration in my writing. Right now, I'm developing a project titled *Yellow Paper*, which brings together photography, performance, poetry, and prose.

HT: What kind of dialogue do you try to create between literature and visual art in your projects?

Nikolić: I recently read *Just Kids* by Patti Smith. At that moment, I was already creating my own photographs—staged frames, recorded performances, and handwritten words on yellow paper. *Yellow Paper* became both a form of resistance and a personal confession: a response to media sensationalism, but also an intimate space. That book helped me realize I'm not alone. There are others like me—people who create across forms without needing to separate them with cold, rigid walls. The boundaries don't have to exist at all.

HT: Are there any specific exhibitions or collaborations at the Gallery that have made an impact on you?

Nikolić: There have been many exhibitions over the years, but this time I'd like to highlight the sculptors. I'm always excited when we get the opportunity to present sculpture—whether it's made of stone or wool. These exhibitions are often very demanding and expensive to produce, but they're absolutely essential. I truly enjoy collaborating with artists from different generations and following their work over time. A few years ago, we hosted an art colony that brought together artists from all over the world, working across different disciplines. It was interesting to see how many of them, even those classically trained in painting, had moved toward mixed media practices.

HT: Do you have any particular advice for the young artists and writers?

Nikolić: Whatever you do, put in the effort. Build your foundation on knowledge, not just information. Be persistent and consistent. That is the only true path to freedom.

Lana Mesić - Joy in Both Demystifying and Remystifying**; August 26, 2025**

In *Čov(j)eče, ne ljuti se!*, Lana Mesić explores reconciliation, memory, and collective action through an unexpected medium: 18,245 hand-painted game pawns. What began as a

search for forgiveness in post-genocide Rwanda evolved into a deeply personal and political meditation on the unresolved tensions of the former Yugoslavia. Through play, ritual, and participation, the work invites viewers to imagine new forms of unity, rooted not in nostalgia, but in shared creation.

About the project Čov(j)eče, ne ljuti se!

HT: Can you describe the moment when the idea for this work first came to you?

Mesić: I think ideas like this form gradually; there is rarely a single "aha" moment. For me, it went something like this: The first seed was planted back in 2014, when I was working on the *Anatomy of Forgiveness* project in Rwanda. I photographed reconciliation—or attempts at it—between Hutus and Tutsis. It had been a wish of mine to show this work in the former Yugoslav region, and I got the opportunity at the Organ Vida festival in Zagreb. Right before the opening, my grandmother, quite worriedly, turned to me and said, "Ah, child, I hope everything goes all right. And how is it that they are able to reconcile there, while here, tensions never seem to ease up?" That really stuck with me. So, my initial aim was to look for reconciliation in the ex-Yugo region, and I tried! But I couldn't quite find it, which was sad but also a reality I had to face. I realized I needed to reflect on what I was really searching for and why

HT: How did your experience in Rwanda shape the direction of this project?

Mesić: Being in Rwanda was surreal and deeply moving. I remember meeting two women, both named Francine and same age as me, who had hidden during the conflict. At the same time, I had been hiding in bomb shelters across the globe. There was a strange sense of connection, as if we had gone through it together, yet apart. Visiting the genocide memorial in Butare was another powerful moment. On the final floor, I came face to face with Srebrenica and the men responsible. It floored me. Until then, I had kept art and life somewhat separate, but that moment blurred everything. Still, there was beauty in meeting the Francines and witnessing attempts at reconciliation. It was then that I realized I would have to explore reconciliation back "home," though I didn't yet know what form that search would take.

HT: Why did you choose to use figurines from the game Čovječe, ne ljuti se? (eng. Ludo)

Mesić: There are several reasons. First, I was in a bit of a photography crisis, asking myself what it really means to hang a photo on a wall. Can it do more, move people, make them think or feel? At the time, I was working with everyday objects that I sculpted and photographed, but gradually I let the objects stand on their own. The material became essential. For example, in my previous project I made everything out of matches. Inspired by Bruce Nauman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*, I wanted to provoke a strong reaction. And it worked. People would walk into my studio and immediately ask: "When will you light them on fire?" During COVID, my aunt sent me a meme of people in hazmat suits with the caption, "Look at our guys in their gear, same as Čovječe ne ljuti se." I loved the absurdity of it, and somewhere along the way I realized that the pawns would make perfect "pixels" for this work. The symbolism of the game, even its name *Čovječe ne ljuti se* (eng. Man, don't get angry), felt like a direct echo of politics. The roll of the dice, the arbitrary fate of the pawns, and the idea that you are supposed to accept it without complaint. That's what conflict feels like to me. Winners and losers are declared in an almost random way, while everything that is lost and destroyed is overlooked. The only way to cope is with humor. In the end, everyone

kind of lost anyway. But the humor, and the collective aspect of the work, keeps it from being a total bummer. At least, I hope so.

HT: How did you interpret them in the context of reconciliation and political tensions?

Mesić: In my research, I spent a lot of time looking into the history of Yugoslavia, past and present. I watched archival footage of Dan Mladosti (eng. The Day of Youth), when Tito's birthday was celebrated. Children, the Pioniri, formed living slogans and shapes with their bodies: flowers, emblems, symbols of unity. There was also the Štafeta Mladosti, a baton carried across the country by young people. The message was simple: alone you can't do much, but together, if you cooperate, you can do anything. It was naive, maybe, but also beautiful. And despite everything that came after, I still believe in those values. In a way, I wanted to bring that spirit back into my work. Not in a Yugo-nostalgic sense, but to show what becomes possible when you shift perspective. When you take power back from dogmas and simply come together. In this project, the people who build the image are the image. That's a quiet but important shift. Around that table, people from all over the former Yugoslavia sat together and built the image. There were no political tensions, just people, side by side, creating something. It was meditative and soothing, and it felt like the reconciliation I had been searching for. Maybe it's only a gesture, but I believe small gestures can carry real weight. Whatever politicians may have broken, reconciliation can still live in the next generations.

HT: What are some key symbols or elements in the installation that stand out to you?

Mesić: The pawns are the biggest one, all 18,245 of them! What I love is that you can't immediately see the image. Each pawn is a pixel. People come close to see what the piece is made of, but then they can't see the full picture. They step back and then it starts making sense. That's kind of how historic events work, isn't it? When you're in the middle of something, it's hard to make sense of it. Only with distance, in space or time, can things become clear. But the tricky part is: who gets to write that history? Who decides which images we remember?

HT: Can you describe your performance? What it looks like and what it involves?

Mesić: The work involves 18,245 pawns, all of them hand-painted by me. Each pawn was assigned a code: there were twelve colors in total, and together with a very talented friend (basically a wizard in these things), I created a kind of paint-by-numbers guide. Every pawn had its designated place. They were placed into ten large MDF boards, CNC-cut with precise holes so the pawns would fit snugly. But here's the most important part: I didn't assemble it myself. Since I wanted to democratize the image and "give it back to the people" (and also to nod, in a way, to the old idea of brotherhood and unity) I invited others to build it. Through an open call, people from the ex-Yugoslav diaspora in the Netherlands came together. Over the course of two days, they placed every single pawn into position (well, mostly in the right spots, haha). The whole process was filmed from above. It became something meditative, almost ritualistic: slowly building the image of the peace treaty together. We ate ćevapčići, listened to ex-Yugo rock, and worked side by side. It was surreal, and also very beautiful.

HT: How does the audience respond to your work?

Mesić: I think, or at least I like to believe, it's equal parts wonder and equal parts "Are you insane?" The reactions tend to unfold in stages, almost like a rocket launch. First comes disbelief: "Wait… 18,245 pawns!?" Then curiosity: I explain that it's the Peace Agreement signed in the aftermath of the Bosnian War, built by people from across different ex-Yugo backgrounds. And then comes the pause, the moment when it clicks. That's when I see this mix in their faces: wonder, warmth, and also a bit of sadness. It's a strange cocktail of feelings, but I like to believe it's the right one. I've

always said I'm too softhearted for politics. The only way I can approach activism is like this: with softness, with play, with color, with gestures that invite rather than confront. There's a lot of warmth woven into the project, and my hope — and what I often sense — is that the audience feels held by that warmth, even as they sit with the weight of the history it carries.

HT: What role does the idea of play have here, as a part of the concept you're creating?

Mesić: I've always been fascinated by how much football resembles war. In its language, symbolism, and emotional stakes. George Orwell famously said that football is "war minus the shooting". That line stayed with me. It made me start wondering if games could also promote cooperation, instead of just competition. What happens when we frame diplomacy as a game? What kind of play leads to collaboration? And what does it mean when a game never really ends? There's another quote I return to often, from Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*: "We must conclude, therefore, that civilization, in its earliest phases, was played. It does not emerge from play as a baby detaches itself from the womb; rather, it arises within and through play, and never fully separates from it." That idea resonates deeply with me. I believe that play allows us to access things we might not be able to reach in everyday life. It interrupts the usual routines and opens space for imagination. It helps us imagine something different, something better. And that is so important. Because sometimes life is hard, and we feel defeated, like nothing we do matters. But play offers an antidote to that feeling. It reminds us that other ways of being are possible.

HT: Who or what was your biggest inspiration throughout the process?

Mesić: One of my biggest inspirations throughout this process was Francis Alÿs, especially his project *When Faith Moves Mountains* and other works where people come together to do something seemingly impossible or absurd. In his practice, the performative act is not just about the outcome but about what it means to the people doing it. There is a quiet poetry in that. A kind of softness that carries strength. It stays with you. I am usually not a big fan of abstract art, but Bruce Nauman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* comes to mind simply because of how strongly people reacted to it. The piece stirred such intense emotions that some viewers complained, and one even slashed it with a knife. Whether they loved it or hated it, the fact that it made them feel something so deeply is what stayed with me. That, to me, is powerful. That is also what I hope to do. To create experiences that awaken something in people. A moment of childlike awe and/or shared effort. Last but not least, I have to mention Ai Weiwei, especially his work *Kui Hua Zi* (eng. Sunflower Seeds). The installation consists of millions of individually handcrafted porcelain sunflower seeds, spread across a wide space. I am fascinated by how the work transforms something seemingly small into a powerful collective statement. His ability to combine meticulous craftsmanship with poetic and symbolic meaning, while engaging audiences beyond the gallery, is something I am always striving to reach in my own practice.

HT: Is there a character or narrative within the work that feels especially important to you?

Mesić: The work depicts the Dayton Peace Agreement, and most people will immediately recognize the main players: the presidents of Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia. What struck me from the beginning was the sheer absurdity of it all. A handful of old men sitting around a table, signing a piece of paper, while Bill Clinton, fresh from a sex scandal, and Jacques Chirac hovered over their shoulders. I even heard a story (from someone who worked in presidential security, so take it as rumor) that Tuđman and Milošević (visibly drunk) were in great spirits, laughing together, while treating Izetbegović with open hostility. At one point, Milošević supposedly slapped him on the

back and said, “Don’t worry, be happy”, which was a hit song at the time. It’s grotesque and surreal all at once. And then, as if the scene weren’t already absurd enough, the original treaty itself went missing. Disappeared. A new authorized copy was made, which was never even translated into the languages of the region. Later, a man from a village near Sarajevo literally stole it and tried to sell it for fifty thousand Deutsche Marks. That alone feels like a film script waiting to be made and hopefully one day I get to tell that story on screen. But with this work, my intention wasn’t to simply re-stage that theatre of politics. I wanted to flip the spotlight away from the leaders, away from the caricature of power. For me, the real narrative is about the so-called pawns, the ordinary people, who have the potential to rewrite the story. All over the world, we’ve seen what can happen when people come together. Demonstrations still remain one of the most powerful tools against oppressive, corrupt governments. When people unite, anything can happen, especially when they’re fighting the good fight. That, to me, is what really matters. And that’s what I tried to capture with this work, even if only in a small way.

On artistic approach and development

HT: How did your shift away from photography as your main medium happen?

Mesić: At the heart of my practice lies a fascination with the invisible, the forces that shape our lives but resist direct representation. Growing up, I absorbed a sense of wonder from bedtime stories about the mysteries of the world (which my mother would read to me, haha). At the same time, I witnessed the disappearance of Yugoslavia, the country where I was born, as borders and nations changed almost overnight. That combination of awe and dislocation left me curious about how we give shape to things we cannot see. As a documentary photographer, I kept asking: what do these invisible powers look like? The more I searched, the clearer it became that they could not be captured directly with a camera. They had to be approached differently. The shift in my approach is first clearly visible in *Souls, Ties and a Pile of Carrots*. There, I investigated the failures of the 2008 economic crisis, asking bankers seemingly naive questions about the system they worked within. I then translated the amount of time they gave me in interviews into the time I literally invested in cross-stitching their portraits. The longer the conversation, the sharper the portrait became, mimicking economic value. Cross-stitch is traditionally a female craft in which women passed down skills and values to their daughters. In this context each stitch became a pixel, again representing value but in a very different way. Since then, I have continued to seek materials with symbolic weight, always rooted in a photographic way of thinking but no longer bound by the camera.

HT: What do installation and performance allow you to express that photography doesn’t?

Mesić: I am fascinated by things that do not have an image and yet govern our lives. How wondrous it is to be human, to believe in and act upon concepts that are essentially invisible. We like to think we live in a rational world, but many of the forces that shape us are nebulous at best. Installation and performance allow me to explore exactly this tension. There is a joy in both demystifying and remystifying, taking something as dry as banking or the politics of conflict and finding wonder in it, and then giving that sense of wonder back to others. For example, in *Heist Reversed*, I dumped 15,000 pennies next to Regent’s Canal in London and filmed what happened. The video went viral almost immediately. People’s reactions to the pile of pennies were full of curiosity and delight: one man even showered himself in the coins, like a real-life Dagobert Duck. I was interested in how people interact with money, a force that has become increasingly abstract and intangible. Next to this video, I also photographed the

pennies, building three huge towers from the pile, but no photograph could capture the sense of wonder of that live moment, of people stumbling upon a random heap of money in the city. In that sense, installation and performance give me the space to circumvent our desensitization to images. In today's fast-moving visual culture, flooded with images, it takes new strategies to cut through and touch people. These formats let me create situations where wonder can still be felt, shared, and experienced together.

HT: How would you describe your transition into a more interdisciplinary approach?

Mesić: Like with most good art, my transition happened through a lot of trial and error. I often found myself fabulously failing, and then finding my way out of self-imposed problems. I was never really a purist documentary photographer; I was always looking for different strategies to tease out the invisible. It all started in my graduation work *Clever Eyes*, where I devised photographic experiments that asking the question "What do invisible things look like? They were all quite whimsical. For example, I worked with a police sketch artist to create a composite portrait of God, using all the paintings of God I could find. I then printed it as a wanted poster asking, "Have you seen this person?". The people that I found I then photographed and they, for all sense and purposes, became god. More recently, I created an image out of matches depicting Milodrag Zdravković, the TV presenter who had to tell the Yugoslav people that Tito had died. That match piece caught fire by accident in my studio, long story (laughter), but after the fire was extinguished, I realized it had left a perfect print on my linoleum studio floor. The fire itself had made a photographic image, which felt like the perfect embodiment of what that work was about (the looming dangers of rampant nationalism). Even now, I often depend on these magnificent failures, learning to develop a nose for them before they become too dangerous. Over time, I realized that these experiments do not always need the camera as an overarching support. They can stand on their own, and that was the real shift into a more interdisciplinary practice.

HT: How important is the physical presence of the audience compared to documentation?

Mesić: It is everything. Like in quantum physics, although I say this with the confidence of someone who barely passed high school math, the observer changes the outcome. I genuinely do not think my work exists without the audience. Or at least, not fully. There is something about having real bodies in a space, breathing the same air, reacting in real time. That shared presence gives the work its charge. It is not just about looking at something, but about being with something. Participating. Feeling it. Smelling the ćevapčići, hearing the ex-Yugo rock, standing beside someone else who is quietly feeling something too. Documentation is fine. Of course I document the work. I am not reckless. But honestly, a photo or video will never fully capture the energy of people coming together to build something, to play, to remember, or to imagine something better. That part is alive. That part is sacred. That part needs an audience. So yes. Without people, it is just a lot of pawns in a room. With people, it becomes something else entirely.

HT: Do you have any artistic influences or references that inspired this project?

Mesić: I've already mentioned Francis Alÿs and Ai Weiwei. Next to them, I've been very inspired by Walid Raad, especially his *Atlas Group* project, which explores historical narratives and blurs the line between fiction and reality. His approach offered me a framework for thinking about how games can carry symbolic weight in conflict and reconciliation. Likewise, Beatriz González's exploration of violence and reconciliation through empathetic gestures has been important for me, as she shows how art can create nuanced contemplations around the difficult subjects of healing and diplomacy.

Broader questions about art and society

HT: What does the phrase “Plan the action, not the outcome” mean to you?

Mesić: Politics, in the conventional sense, more often than not stress me out. But of course, I live in a society, in a world, and I feel a responsibility to contribute in a way that fits who I am. I know my strengths and my limits. I’m a bit introverted, a bit of an anxious type, so I had to ask myself: how can you engage with the world, be an activist even, from a place of wonder and joy and also without burning out? That’s where this phrase comes in. I can’t plan “make the world a better place” as an outcome. But I can plan an action: above all to be kind, to bring people together to do something meaningful, playful, or thought-provoking. That’s within my control. The rest unfolds on its own.

HT: How do you see the role of art in processes of social reconciliation?

Mesić: Art won’t change the entire world but it might change someone’s world. And that’s a world. I believe in soft gestures. In showing up for hope. In doing things together, in humor, the absurd, in wonder. In zooming in and zooming out. In offering a different angle, in being kind, in coming together. In being an antidote to the right-wing nonsense. In pointing out what’s wrong, but also showing how things could be. Above all, I believe that small things can move big things.

HT: What can art offer when politics fails?

Mesić: Perspective.

HT: What themes are currently most important to you, outside of this project?

Mesić: An ongoing theme in my work is the mind’s constant struggle to confront that which does not have an image. As a child, while others drifted into sleep with nursery rhymes, I was lulled by the strange and arcane, mysterious artifacts, cryptic phenomena, and the unexplainable wonders of the world. My mother’s bedtime readings of Arthur C. Clarke’s *Mysteries of the World* left me with a lasting belief that the universe is vast, magical, and unfathomably strange. This sense of wonder was deepened by my experience of being born in a country that no longer exists, Yugoslavia, which vanished into thin air like Atlantis. Whole nations can disappear and reappear, just like that, by signing some magical papers. Their borders as slippery as snakes. Each new migration meant adapting to cultures that often felt like an ill-fitting suit, they served their purpose, but there was always something itching beneath the surface. It’s perhaps no surprise, then, that I’m fascinated by our human ability to think about things that don’t have an image and then to go looking for precisely those images. From spirits to quantum physics, or even our own emotions, we keep trying to give form to the intangible. Because when we see something, we can understand it better. And I think my artistic practice is a continuous attempt to understand things better but also, paradoxically, to leave room for wonder.

HT: Do you have any advice for young artists starting their career?

Mesić: Five things. 1. Be incredibly curious. Everything becomes interesting if you zoom in far enough. Even doorknobs. Especially doorknobs. Let your brain wander and follow the weird stuff. Curiosity is your best tool. 2. Fail. Fail hard and often. In every single project I’ve done, there’s been a moment where I thought, well, that’s it, this is a disaster. But almost every time, that so-called failure came right before a breakthrough. So, lean into it. Get excited when things go wrong. It probably means something good is about to happen. 3. Enjoy the process. Ignore the accolades and the bad reviews alike. If you find the thing that gets you into that flow state, where the time melts and the rest of the world disappears, that’s your gold. Protect it. That part is yours. 4. Apply to everything. Open calls, residencies, grants, the weird little things that seem like long shots. Apply anyway. Even if you don’t get in, someone might remember your work. You

never know who's watching. 5. Get an accountant. Seriously. Most artists are terrible at this because of how our brains are wired. Also, nobody teaches us this stuff. Just outsource it. Save your brain for the good stuff. Bonus: Never forget: duct tape is an art supply.

Mustafa Mlinarević — Expression as Real as Truthful as It Can Be**; September 18, 2025**

Mustafa Mlinarević (2002) is a Bosnian and Herzegovinian artist and graphic designer. He graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, Department of Graphic Design. In his design practice, he has collaborated with clients such as BH Pošta, the Academy of Performing Arts in Sarajevo, the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Sarajevo, and the International Forum Bosnia. His knowledge in the field of graphic design directly influences his artistic practice, which is based on communicating the formal values of existing objects. Whether it's a universal message carried by the objects or their subjective and sentimental value, the author strives to communicate it clearly and appropriately. He primarily works in the media of photography and installations, addressing various socio-political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond.

HT: What inspired you to explore the relationships between everyday objects and their hidden artistic or emotional value?

Mlinarević: It is actually something that I have thought about for several years now. For this series, actually, it was a moment of realization where I had a friend compliment a piece of my clothing and I said that it belonged to my late uncle. And then I rewound back in time and found that I have several objects that people tend to compliment that were all something that used to belong to someone else. These items may not always be to my taste per se, but they have a big emotional gravitas in my life and I was surely not the only person who felt like this. This was something that my mentor saw as a very complex emotion but as a definite challenge to present.

HT: In what ways do you think intervention changes the meaning of an object?

Mlinarević: Well, if we talk graphically or visually, if you flip an object, it becomes some sort of an anti-symbol of what it used to be. By reversing its position, we reverse the original meaning. Let alone adding to the object or subtracting can make actually drastically different meanings. What I like about intervention in objects is that it usually does not take a lot of materials to do it, rather it emphasizes the idea and stimulates the viewers' perception. In this process creating a specific sequence of repeating elements was a true challenge. Since the elements had to evoke nostalgia and human absence but also be applicable to a series of photographs that was not repetitive and individual.

HT: How did you collect the stories and objects featured in Objects of Meaning? Were people eager to share?

Mlinarević: At first, I thought about what I would give to the series, and then slowly through casual talks with friends I got a few objects. Then I resorted to posting it

on social media as a project. Asking people if I could borrow the objects. It took a little bit of time, but people were eager to share. A lot of the time someone would say "I don't know if it fits your concept“. I always found that funny since the actual diversity in the objects was a part that I could not control and it led to some unexpected parts of the series.

HT: Why did you choose a gray background for the photographs? What atmosphere or emotion were you hoping to evoke?

Mlinarević: The gray background was actually something that we came up with during the first shootings. The first idea was revolving around authentic spaces in which people live to present the idea of nostalgia. But later the idea of a singular, surreal space was born. The gray space kind of is a representation of the space between life and death. Like a pocket dimension. But also, at the same time, it is kind of like the imaginary space in our memory. A lot of the time when we try to retrieve memories or dreams in our head, especially if they were long ago, we see it always in like a white space, we never have fully clear setting. Always some pieces of the space are missing.

HT: What role does the flower play in each photograph, and how did you decide which type of flower to use?

Mlinarević: The flowers were the first elements to be brought into the series following the objects. When thinking about death we often use flowers to honor the ones who have passed. But also, interestingly, we often talk about heavenly gardens. The idea of heavenly gardens appears in all Abrahamic religions, and I think that we culturally have always put emphasis on our gardens as places of peace and serenity.

HT: You mentioned that your work is an “honest expression of personal contemplation.” What does honesty in art mean to you?

Mlinarević: Well... honesty should be a must in art. Why create something if it does not represent an honest wish to do so. We are all real people, and real emotions, and ideas, as such, our expression should be as real and as truthful as they can be.

HT: Do you plan to continue exploring themes of memory and human values in your future projects?

Mlinarević: I honestly hope to... I mean, we as humans tend to often forget important figures and legacies that people have left for us. Remembering and acknowledging the past is a way of living through life in third person. We get the experience and learn more about life without living it ourselves. Especially nowadays when lives have become trivial to those who rule. I also think that it is a type of trauma coping. Sadly, we never learned to cope with trauma and loss the proper way. So, I think that there is still a space where we can work. In other capacities and types of works but still having the same underlying messages. I would also take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to my mentors, professor Dragana Antonić and her assistant Haris Adžem on their unconditional support and trust through this artistic process. There are many more things we couldn’t touch up on during this conversation but maybe another time. I would also thank all of my colleagues and friends who actually lent me very important objects of theirs.

Objects of meaning

Guided by the idea that we are surrounded daily by objects that hold artistic value, and that it is only necessary to find the right relationships between these objects in order to compose greater stories, I base my practice on discovering those relationships. What we observe every day takes on a completely different meaning the moment we make an intervention. These meanings can be both positive and negative—

just like the people who interpret them. I believe that as human beings, we need to "read" our surroundings more deeply, because only in that way can we truly separate ourselves from what others want us to think. In a world where we are bombarded with information, we tend to take everything at face value and become superficial in our critical understanding of the environment. My work aims to provoke deeper reflection on fundamental human values, while remaining an honest expression of personal contemplation.

The photographic series *Objects of Meaning* is a cycle of fifteen photographs that depict objects inherited by people from their deceased loved ones. The series explores the meaning we attribute to these objects while simultaneously paying tribute to those who are no longer with us by pairing each object with flowers. The series is created to evoke a sense of a bygone era and the absence of people, while its gray background invokes a surreal, heavenly space. The window, which appears as a recurring element, represents a passage between worlds and a glimpse into the "other side."

Author's biography

Hana Tiro (born 1994, Sarajevo) works as translator, proofreader, journalist, researcher, collaborator on regional nongovernmental projects, and as a digital communications expert. As an independent researcher, Hana Tiro wrote interdisciplinary papers in English language covering art, language, medicine, and technology, and her work has been published in Bosnian-Herzegovinian and international academic journals. She is the author of the poetry collection *Sarajevo Shit* (2024), which was shortlisted for the regional Mak Dizdar poetry award at the Slovo Gorčina Festival in 2023. She earned degrees from the Faculty of Philosophy University of Sarajevo, completing studies in the Department of English Language and Literature and the Department of Comparative Literature.

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